THIS SPECIAL ISSUE examines the artistic and creative practices emerging in East Asia and how they are gaining prominent status, not only in the art scene, but in society as a whole. Rather than mirroring social transformations, these groundbreaking practices initiate thought-provoking alternatives for both art and life. They have become instrumental for bringing forward new subjectivities and reshaping the intrinsic values of social and cultural well-being.
The Focus

Artistic Alternatives in East Asia

29-30 Introduction by Minna Valjakka

This special issue examines the artistic and creative practices emerging in East Asia and how they are gaining prominent status, not only in the art scene, but in society as a whole. Rather than mirroring social transformations, these groundbreaking practices initiate thought-provoking alternatives for both art and life. They have become instrumental for bringing forward new subjectivities and reshaping the intrinsic values of social and cultural well-being.

31 Wei Hua Tung explores the extent to which the Taiwan participatory project Art as Environment: A Cultural Action of Plum Tree Creek has a sustainable social impact on the local community by inducing aesthetic environmental awakening.

32-33 Meiqin Wang discusses the work of a number of contemporary Chinese artists who address the problem of waste in relation to the social and environmental downsides brought about by China’s rampant urbanization and consumerism.

34-35 By taking the case of the Dongdamsan Rooftop Paradise, a community-engaged, collaborative, and collective art practice in Seoul, Hong Kal explores how artists seek to intervene in the hegemonic politics of spectators in urban redevelopment and what kind of space is imagined to become a ‘paradise’ within the unjust city.

36-37 Xi Jinping’s ‘China Dream’ finds its materialization in Beijing in speedy ring roads, fancy buildings designed by starchitects, and green parks. This dream is quite firmly located within the fifth ring road. As shown in this article by Jeroen de Kloet and Deng Liwen, the art of Ma Lijiao intercedes, challenges and interrupts such dreams.

38-39 Bigotry and nationalism are rife in Japan’s digital-media dominated landscape. What methods are needed to achieve suitable media literacy in the 21st century? Shin Mitsukoshi examines the case for ‘digital storytelling’ as one promising method. This article examines the possibilities of people’s story-interweaving activities.

40-41 Even though ‘hacking’ the urban infrastructure may also cause conflicts, new agencies and strategies of urban creativity have a growing ability to raise awareness of socio-political issues. Two case studies presented by Minna Valjakka show how the provocation of contradictory views can initiate new subjectivities and ways to employ the public space.
Developing sustained collaborations

I was recently asked to reflect on IIAAS’s collaborative and partnership philosophy. I take the opportunity of this tribute to elaborate on the subject, especially as my attention and that of many of my colleagues is currently focused on two ongoing major initiatives: our new humanistic pedagogical programme ‘Humanities Across Borders, Asia and Africa in the World’, and the tenth edition of ICAS in Chiang Mai next July.

Philippe Peycam

I see academic collaborations and partnerships as primarily a civic effort that should be built around intellectual dialogues and interactions, involving different segments of knowledge in society in a closely connected world. Ideally, they should be framed around inclusive institutions and programmes that ought to act as bridges or facilitators with the capacity to focus on open methodological and intellectual perspectives, beyond the mere promotion of narrowly defined disciplinary projects or of individual or institutional trajectories.

The adventure and success of IIAAS as a local-global connector has comforted me in the idea that there is a need for a kind of civic-minded institution that is not only capable of countering a trend towards fragmentation and marginalization in the style of the neo-liberal model. The need is also critically to address contemporary-related issues to be framed in their historical and geographical ecologies, through interdisciplinary, local-global collaborative engagements. Such institutions should ideally draw from trans-regional networks of scholars and organizations from both the South and the North. An inclusive intercultural platform is a good alternative to an academic tradition built on the definition of segmented ‘areas’, with the risk of confinement of ‘studies’ in narrow epistemological boundaries.

IIAS stands as an academic ‘public service’ born during a still recent era in Europe when notions of public good and solidarity stood above those of outright competition between institutions and people(s). It aims to serve as a bridge between different intellectual and cultural traditions and between what are deemed ‘high knowledge’ and more ‘popular’ or ‘vernacular’ ones. Closely connected to a historic academic institution, the University of Leiden, yet operating autonomously from it, IIAS concomitantly supports research, teaching and social policy engagements in ways that transcend disciplinary, institutionally or geographically segmented ‘area studies’.

IIAS operates a number of initiatives under each of its inter-disciplinary thematic clusters (‘Heritage and Culture’, ‘Urbanization’, ‘Asia in the World’), a double-degree program in critical heritage, the multi-sector platform Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA), the facilitation of inclusive Asia-Africa and Latin-America axes of knowledge, and the new Mellon-supported trans-regional pedagogical initiative, ‘Humanities Across Borders’. Each of these initiatives seeks to experiment with new dialogical forms with outcomes not restricted to the quantifiable delivery of publications or taught courses, but rather, to the incubation of organically framed academic ‘deliverables’ likely to take shape in consonance with local contexts and needs.

To do so, the Institute supports a range of signature methodological ‘services’, each aimed at a broadly defined Asia Studies community: the widely (and freely) disseminated resource periodical ‘The Newsletter’ (50,000 readers); the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) with its multi-format activities, its five-language book prizes and its global governance. The institute’s Summer/Winter in situ masterclasses – a model also applied to IIAAS’s local-policy applied events. The synergies built between IIAAS’s multiple activities contribute to its programmatic coherence. They explain the rather considerable global role IIAAS commands in relation to its actual size (16 staff members only).

Beyond the organizational setting, building lasting partnerships and collaborations requires a sense of an over-arching purpose. In its operations, the Institute is often asked to facilitate interactions between academic and intellectual communities, particularly in societies where formal higher education is neither established nor institutionalized as in ‘northern’ regions, but where unexploited forms of creative intellectual, artistic and pedagogical practices are often thrive outside universities. IIAAS’s role as a civic academic facilitator allows it to support a collective strategy, for instance for the development of a local museum (Eastern Asia Tempara, 2012; Delhi, 2016), or for the revitalization of an urban area (Taipae, 2012; Yangon, Macau, 2014), or a cultural and social tradition (Pingyao, 2015).

Our institute operates in and beyond traditional academic circles, involving different actors as co-producers of knowledge: artists, urban planners, architects, craftsmen /women and other practitioners of ‘embodied knowledge’. It also seeks a sustained dialogue with hard scientists, policy makers, public intellectuals, civic actors and other ‘social educators’. The extended humanistic pedagogy supported by the ‘Humanities Across Borders’ new programme or the civil-society-sensitive ICAS events, in Africa, Latin America and soon at the upcoming ICAS 10 in Chiang Mai, Thailand, are expressions of the Institute’s versatility as a truly global platform for Connected Knowledge.

Philippe Peycam, Director IIAAS
Southeast Asian film festivals

The start of this millennium has arguably seen a marked renaissance in the various national cinemas of Southeast Asia. The past few years have even brought a rise in production in the long moribund Cambodian film sector, and the beginnings of a filmmaking community in Laos, which has never had a film industry to speak of. The regionally-oriented film festival has emerged as a crucial factor in this broader resurgence not only of production but of local film cultures – in contexts where, in many instances, State or institutional support for film is lackluster.

Adam Knee

SOUTH KOREA'S Busan International Film Festival, held annually (as are most all of the festivals discussed here) in early October, easily takes the mantle of Asia's premier festival, in terms of its not just regional but global recognition and visibility, the volume and quality of its offerings (in both world cinema and Asian cinema, including many premieres), and the range of its programs to encourage film production in the broader Asian region. The festival often spotlights Southeast Asian films and artists, and such programs as the Festival's Asian Film Academy and Asian Cinema Fund have provided vital mentoring and funding for emerging filmmakers from across Asia who in many instances cannot find such support in their home countries. Late October brings another major Asian festival with a partially regional (including Southeast Asian) emphasis, the Tokyo International Film Festival, although not as large or comprehensive in its programs as Busan, it does aim to support developing regional filmmakers for example through its 'Asian Future Film Award', given each year to a promising director from the region.

Another important Asian festival in this regard is the Hong Kong International Film Festival, a large-scale event founded in 1977, which usually screens more than 200 films in March to April of each year. The festival has developed a dual focus on world cinema and Asian cinema (mostly from Hong Kong, mainland China, and Japan, but with an occasional program highlighting a Southeast Asian nation), and it also facilitates Hong Kong co-production for films from across the region through its affiliated Hong Kong Asia Film Financing Forum, an event in which in a number of Southeast Asian filmmakers have participated over the years.

Yet while the global exposure (and support) offered through such festivals as these, as well as (for a successful few Southeast Asian filmmakers) such top Western festivals as those in Cannes, Berlin, Rotterdam and Toronto, can offer a major career boost, they do not do very much for developing the film culture in the respective filmmakers' home countries, nor, in most cases, is there much targeted support for developing local Southeast Asian production – and it is in these areas that film festivals in and of the region can serve crucial functions. As Singapore International Film Festival Executive Director Yuri Hadi describes it, "We've seen our Southeast Asian filmmakers such as Lav Diaz (Philippines), Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Thailand), and most recently Anthony Chen and Boo Junfeng (Singapore) winning top awards at some of the best festivals in the world which helps put the spotlight on us, but it's also very important to have our own film festivals to lead and not just to follow."

A number of locally based festivals have developed to meet these local needs, while also publicizing local and regional production to a larger international audience, although they vary considerably in scale and robustness, often owing in no small part to a dearth of local funds to sustain them. Examples include the Hanoi International Film Festival (founded in 2010), the World Film Festival of Bangkok (begun in 2003), the Jogja-Netpac Asian Film Festival (in Yogyakarta, from 2006), the Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Film Festival (begun in 2005, in Manila), and the Cambodia International Film Festival (which started in Phnom Penh in 2010, but which had its 2016 (7th) edition postponed until March of the following year).

The model: Singapore

The Singapore International Film Festival (SGIFF), which had its first edition back in 1987 and the Luang Prabang Film Festival (LPFF, launched in 2010, in Laos) might appear to be at opposite ends of the Southeast Asian film festival spectrum, in terms of not only number of years in operation but also scale and approach, and yet a brief comparative look at the emphases of their 2016 editions (occurring in overlapping periods in late November to early December) highlights many shared central aims for such festivals.

Undoubtedly the best known of Southeast Asia's festivals, the SGIFF was long seen as exemplary for its promotion of film in the region and in fact the renowned Busan festival took the SGIFF as a model for its own development. And yet, even so-established a festival as SGIFF recently ran into difficulties – a fact which testifies to the precariousness of support for local film cultures in the region, though certainly owing in part to internal struggles unique to itself. After a somewhat uneven 2011 event and a two-year hiatus, the festival came back strongly under new leadership in 2014 and has continued as a significant force in the two years since.

Naturally one of the key aims of the SGIFF is to bring a wide array of films that otherwise might not be readily accessible to an audience composed both of local filmmakers and interested tourists and, given the festival's high profile, many international critics and members of the industry as well. That international audience was fostered in 2016 with the SGIFF's scheduling simultaneously with (and technically as a component part of) the Singapore Media Festival, a government sponsored industry event now in its third year with presentations and workshops on various media production and distribution trends within the region, as well as a market for sales of television and film productions. The SGIFF screened upwards of 160 films in this edition, in a variety of venues mostly in the central area of the city-state, including the newly renovated 1930 landmark Capitol Theatre, local commercial cinemas, and the theaters of such cultural institutions as the National Museum of Singapore and the recently opened National Gallery Singapore.

This year's screenings included a 'Cinema Today' section with films from across Europe, the Americas, and the Pacific, a program highlighting themes of hybridity in Latin-American cinema, and a special sidebar on Estonian animation. But the overwhelming emphasis was on Asian cinema, starting from the opening night red carpet gala screening (at the Marina Bay Sands) of ‘2046’ and ‘99.’
Bay Sands) of Malaysian director Dain Said’s thriller *Interchange*,
which is to see the latest films coming out of the immediate region.
And producers could interact, exchange ideas and information, providing a
space where Laotian and other Southeast Asian filmmakers could
therefore, were to provide an outlet to screen and publicize their
culture to develop there that it seemed to Gabriel Kuperman
precisely because of an evident lack of ways for a local film scene to
emerge. But it was given that only the faintest glimmer of a local production
to reflect the diversity of production from the region.

As important to the festival as giving local exposure for Asian cinema of all varieties is the goal of fostering further, innovative film production within the region. This goal is approached through such programs as short masterclass sessions (open to public registration) with well-known Asian film directors, and panel discussions on such practical topics as (at the 2016 edition) seeking distribution in the present-day environment, working with actors, developing one’s screenplay, and using virtual reality tools. The SGIFF also organized two more extended development programs with local educational institutions: the Southeast Asian Film Lab, a week-long intensive workshop with established filmmaking mentors (held at LASSALLE College of the Arts) for Southeast Asian filmmakers preparing to shoot their first feature films; and the Youth Jury & Critics Programme, a month-long series of workshops by professionals in the field for a group of developing young critics, mounted in conjunction with Nanyang Technological University.

The new blood: Luang Prabang

Back in 2010, Laos might have seemed a very unlikely place to start a film festival aiming to attract an international audience, given that only the faintest glimmer of a local production scene was evident in the country at that time. But it was precisely because of an evident lack of ways for a local film culture to develop there that it seemed to Gabriel Kuperman – an American with a background in media production and programming – that a film festival in Laos would offer many benefits to the community. Kuperman’s aims in founding the film festival in the popular tourist haven of Luang Prabang, therefore, were to provide an outlet to screen and publicize the bit of local production that was being done; to provide a space where Lao and other Southeast Asian filmmakers and producers could interact, exchange ideas and information, and develop regionally-based projects; and also to provide local Luang Prabang (and tourist) audiences an opportunity to see the latest films coming out of the immediate region.

Some seven editions of the Luang Prabang Film Festival later, Kuperman still serves as its director, and it has developed as a major and much anticipated annual event for the town, gaining support over the years not only from the Lao government but also from a variety of corporate and NGO sponsors. Part of the LPFF’s distinctiveness, arising from its regional specificity, is in focusing solely on Southeast Asian film (taken to include not only films by Southeast Asian makers, but also films shot in the region); Kuperman indicates that this is the only major annual international profile film festival that focuses exclusively on the region. Although on a much smaller scale than the SGIFF, in 2016 it showed a total of 32 feature films (a slight increase over the past) along with a selection of shorts, the LPFF has its own distinctive challenges owing to its atypical setting. Perhaps most obviously, there has been the problem of a lack of any functioning film theater in the town. The town was overcome most significantly by utilizing outdoor projection (appropriately, a Southeast Asian tradition) for the main nighttime screenings, which are free to the public and held in a historic, UNESCO-renovated market in the center of town – a market which has become the LPFF’s signature space (and the moveable plastic chairs that are used are now incorporated into the festival’s logo). For 2016, daytime screenings and events were held on the grounds of the five-star Sofitel Luang Prabang (a converted colonial governor’s residence), with feature screenings in one outbuilding with a maximum capacity of 100 viewers, an on-going selection of short films in another outbuilding, and public forums on film-related topics held on the garden lawn in between the two.

The obvious downside here is that the LPFF naturally does not offer the kind of technologically-high-end screening experience some film purists would prefer. But the very significant upside (in addition to the huge public reach of the nighttime screenings, with an estimated 20,000 people present over the course of the week) is the unusually intimate scale of the daytime events, with filmmakers present at a majority of the screenings and available for extended discussions and interactions with audience members. This level of consistent and direct access to the filmmakers is rare for any film festival, and goes a long way to contributing to the LPFF’s goal of fostering connections and synergy among film artists and producers from the region. Thus, although Kuperman was quite pleased with an increase in international attendees in 2016 (evident in part in the need to turn people away from quite a few ‘full houses’ during the daytime screenings), he is wary of making the festival much larger, lest the intimate scale be lost.

As with the SGIFF, one of the goals, besides providing exposure for local film, is to provide support and assistance for local budding filmmakers. In 2016, this came in part through public forums and discussions with experts on such topics as pitching projects, distribution through ‘Video on Demand’ platforms, and the work of national film commissions. A selected group of young regional filmmakers were also invited to participate in a ‘Talent Lab’ led by New York’s well-known Tribeca Film Institute, with a top project from the group subsequently invited to participate in the Tribeca Film Institute Network Market in New York in 2017.

As to the feature films screened in 2016, these comprised a lively mix of contemporary and innovative fiction films and documentaries (with quite a few on controversial topics), chosen by a group of ‘Motion Picture Ambassadors’—film critics and producers from the region who make the picks for the LPFF. Thus, although Kuperman was quite pleased with an increase in international attendees in 2016 (evident in part in the need to turn people away from quite a few ‘full houses’ during the daytime screenings), he is wary of making the festival much larger, lest the intimate scale be lost.

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Mutual aims

While the LPFF and the SGIFF might appear quite different in scale and locale, then, the commonality of their aims is evident. Such events have become vital means for getting the word out about new trends in Southeast Asian production; providing access to local audiences for the broader range of film output; fostering a measure of local film culture, offering training and mentorship opportunities for budding filmmakers; and facilitating dialogue as well as actual collaborations among film artists, producers, and distributors across the region.

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References

1. For interested readers, more details of the SGIFF’s track record promoting film in the region can be found in a short volume published on the occasion of the festival’s 25th anniversary (in 2014: *Histories and legacies of the Singapore International Film Festival*, edited by Ben Slater.)
Appropriating hybridized cultures: Recreating Peranakan culture in Jonker Street

Tai Wei LIM

Gentrification involves the conversion of dilapidated residences and areas into refurbished units and locales through an influx of residents with a higher earning power. In some cases, gentrified spaces facilitate the local tourism needs and generate income for local proprietors and businesses. Very often, gentrification conforms to a selective interpretation of local history, culture and traditions. It fits the dominant narrative generated by local elites, national policies and political cultures.

As a form of hybrid culture, Peranakan culture enjoys a high level of acceptability because the culture can be simultaneously identified with Malay, Chinese and Western cultures. In other words, it carries the flâvours of all three sources of influences found within Malaysia (Malay, Western and Chinese) and matches the narrative of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. Malacca was one of the venues I selected to examine the reconstruction of Peranakan culture. Due to its World Heritage status, acquired in 2008, there are now stricter rules in place to conserve heritage buildings and assets. I also chose this site because, along with Penang and Singapore, they make up the Straits Settlements where large Peranakan communities are found – another term often used to describe communities that make up the Straits Settlements where large Peranakan communities are found. Each physical display is carefully curated to attract both local and overseas tourists through colourful and tangible and intangible assets.

In terms of tangible assets, one site and Peranakan culture is one of the main attractions of the town. Peranakan culture in Jonker Street can be divided into either Malay or Chinese (or Indian) culture. This is the hybridized nature of the culture itself. Peranakan culture is the result of the cross-pollination of cultures found in the Malayan Peninsula and those introduced to the region by migrants from India and China as well as colonial governments. Gentrifiers, restorers, conservationists and other stakeholders in preserving the Peranakan heritage of Jonker Street need to carefully navigate the cosmopolitan nature of this hybridized culture.

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Islamic ideas versus secularism: The core of political competition in Indonesia

The implementation of sharia law in Indonesia has been increasing ever since democratization in 1998. The country’s Kompas newspaper reported in August 2015 that there are currently 443 peraturan daerah (local regulations) related to Islamic law.1 This growth of Islamic ideas in Indonesian politics challenges the secular ideology that the nation’s foundation was based on, yet this Islamic challenge to secular Indonesian is not a new phenomenon; competition between Islamic and secular ideas has existed during every phase of the republic’s development. In reality, this rivalry is at the core of Indonesian politics.

Wendy Andhika Prapusti

Islamic ideas and secularism in Indonesia’s pre-independence

Islamic and secular philosophies have developed and competed in Indonesian politics since even before independence. In the pre-independence era, the idea of ruling the society based on Islamic teachings can be traced back to the Pdn movement in Minangkabau, West Sumatra. This was a movement by Muslim clerics, who had recently returned from Mecca and wanted to implement the moral and traditional values of the community. This caused conflict with the nobility and the traditional chiefs who wanted to retain Minangkabau customs. The Pdn movement was a non-political movement that focused on doctrinal and normative issues, such as bay‘ah (innovation), polygamy, tomb veneration, correct attire, and the use of products made by non-Muslims.2

The first time that the debate between Islamic and secular viewpoints emerged in Indonesia was around the issue of the Sarekat Islam (SI) organizational platform. In its early years, one of the SI’s biggest problems was whether to change its organizational platform into an Islamic one or for it to remain open to accommodate the communist factions. This deliberation led to conflict between the leaders of SI Semarang, who were supporters of Communist, and other SI leaders, who were supporters of Islam. This political debate concluded with the exclusion of all members of SI Semarang from the organization.3

Another conflict emerged in 1934, when the Indonesian independence movement started. This confrontation concerned the notion of nationalism as the foundation of the republic. For Islamic leaders, such as Agus Salim, Mohammad Natsir, and Ahmad Hassan, nationalism was considered to threaten the Islamic concept of tawhid,4 and would lead to chaosnism. Salim believed that Sukarno’s ideology of nationalism was chauvinistic and exclusive to the fatherland-ideal, leads to competition and rivalry for the acquisition of wealth, honour and pride, to the suppression, enslavement and danger of the fatherland of others without regard to rights and justice.5 In contrast, Indonesian leaders such as Sukarno and Cipto Mangunkusumo, appreciated nationalism for its potential to gain independence, and for its ability to bring together in one nation, people from different ethnicities, holding diverse ideologies, with various faiths or religions. By the late 1930s, the Islamic group started to come around to the idea of nationalism as well.6

Prior to Indonesia’s independence in 1945, another debate arose between the Islamic and the secular groups. The Islamic group rejected the then fifth constitution (w. andhika@gmail.com).

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16. Ibid., Salim, p. 126.
African jurists in Asia: Premodern Afro-Asian interactions

‘The Indian Ocean Muslims’ have contributed to the synthesis of Islamic history for over a millennium, but their roles have been continuously downplayed and disregarded in the historiography. Indians [al-Hindiš], Malays [al-Jawiš] and Wahlis [al-Zanjīš], in South and Southeast Asia and East Africa respectively, interacted across the Indian Ocean highway and all shaped Islam in their own ways. Only a small number of people actually voyaged overseas physically, but they were all influenced by the ideas brought in by those who did. The history of Islamic law in the Indian Ocean tells us this story of the general pattern of mobility across communities, doctrines, texts, sources, places and periods. In this essay, I explore the Africans who worked in South and Southeast Asia as judges, jurists, scholars and preachers in premodern period.

Mahmood Koria

THE ARABS AND PERSIANS played an inevitable role in circulating certain basic ideas of Islam, but they did not ‘export’ Islamic law to ‘the peripheries’ as many studies of Islam in the Indian Ocean littoral have illustrated by ignoring the African and Asian inputs to Islamic law in the Indian Ocean.

TheAtlanticArms

One early reference to a Swahili jurist in South Asia comes from the travel account of Ibn Battīta, a North African who was appointed judge in Delhi, and who wrote in the mid-fourteenth century that he had met one Faqīh Sādīd from Mogadishu working in Malabar in the Ibrahim (HR) community in the latter part of the fourteenth century. According to Ibn Battīta, this Somali jurist had travelled from Mogadishu to both Mecca and Medina, had studied there for fourteen years, and had been in touch with many scholars of the Holy Cities as well as their rulers Muhammad Abū Nusayy in Mecca (c. 1254-1301) and Mamlūk bin Jammār in Medina (c. 1300-1325). Based on the rulers’ regnal years, we can assume that Ibn Battīta studied in Mecca sometime between 1291 and 1300, and in Medina between 1303 and 1315. After his education in Hijaz, Faqīh Sādīd travelled to India and China, but we do not know what sort of jobs he took at the places he visited. He settled down finally in Malabar in a port-town called Ezhimala, which was frequented by several Chinese ships and had a very active religious sphere. It had an important congregational mosque, a madrasa, and an imam and both Muslims and infidels respected the mosque for its blessedness (hurūfīs), seafarers used it as a place of asylum, and above all it served as a link between the Muslim community and the non-Muslim society in the area. He settled down finally in Malabar in a port-town called Ezhimala, which was frequented by several Chinese ships and had a very active religious sphere. It had an important congregational mosque, a madrasa, and an imam and both Muslims and infidels respected the mosque for its blessedness (hurūfīs), seafarers used it as a place of asylum, and above all it served as a link between the Muslim community and the non-Muslim society in the area.

Ibn Battīta gives only a short description of this ‘other Arab’ who had far outshone his own journeys. The biographer indicates that Faqīh Sādīd was not an exceptional case in his time and that there were many Muslim African scholars like him who found their way to Asian Islamic communities in premodern times. Immediately after mentioning Faqīh Sādīd, Ibn Battīta talks about another Malabar port-town called jurfattan, three leagues south of Ezhimala, and adds more to the story of the practice of inheritance law among the Malabaris and Sudanis. The context of comparison in the text is interesting as he makes it with regard to an Arab jurist from Baghdad. He writes:

There [in jurfattan] I met a jurist from Baghdad of high stature, named al-Jawīs, who had a brother in this town with a lot of money which he had asked to give to his young children by will. The deceased person’s property was kept in shipload to Baghdad. The custom (istidlāl) of the Indians is the like the custom (istidlāl) of the Sudan that they do not interpose in the property of the deceased. Even if the person leaves thousands, his property would remain with the leader of the Muslims until the inheritor takes it according to shur.’

The motivations behind his comparison of a regional custom in Malabar with the one in Sudan (or broadly ‘black Africa’, if we follow H.A.R. Gibb’s translation) are very intriguing, especially as he says that the property of the deceased person finally reaches the legal inheritor. ‘This implies that many parts of the Islamic law would probably include such a rule in every region. But the question is, why should the ‘shur’ mode of dividing inheritance in the absence of an inheritor. Further research is needed to make a conclusive answer, but for the moment, the same legality in the local practices of Muslims in Malabar/India and Sudan/East Africa as remarked by a North African jurist who had travelled extensively in these regions. Another important African who worked in South Asia was Yāqūt al-Chīrī from fifteenth-century Bengal. He undertook a challenging project of establishing a law college in Mecca on behalf of the Bengal king, Ghīyāth al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Razzāk Shah (c. 1390-1411). We do not have much biographical information on Yāqūt outside the details of his journey from Bengal to Mecca and his incredible activities in the city as told by the Meccan historians. But certainly he was part of a larger Abyssinian community in Bengal in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, similar to many more in the whole of South Asia and across the Indian Ocean rim. Yāqūt was well-versed in navigation, administration and diplomacy – a few matters that became very explicit during his Mecca mission. I have written in detail about this fascinating project of legal connections and circulations of people, ideas and money between the Swahili coast, Bengal and Mecca.

Only to elaborate briefly on Yāqūt, we do not know what his status was in the Bengal royal court. The Arabic nouns like ʿal-ʾAbī [pearl], ʿal-ʾArbi [pearl] and Yāqūt (sapphire) were given as distinctive names to the black African slaves sold in the Middle Eastern markets, and many of them sustained those names even after their manumission. From the cognomen Yāqūt it is difficult to identify whether he was a slave, a freeborn, or an agent of the king. The Meccan historian Fāsī gives his full name as Yāqūt al-ṣubṭī al-Chīrī, which clearly indicates his bondage with Sultan Ghīyāth al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Razzāk Shah. Furthermore, al-Fāsī praises him by calling him ‘ṣubṭī al-ʿalī al-fīrāfī’ [his excellence and lord], surely for the ideas and money he brought into Mecca. ʿĀzīz al-Shah assigned him with responsibilities to purchase land, to construct appropriate building for madrasa and to take necessary formal steps in making the legal officially valid. Yāqūt went several steps further by gathering support from many Meccan elites, many of whom he eventually appointed as professors in the madrasa, including the historian and judge al-Fāsī. After accomplishing his mission, Yāqūt commenced his return to Bengal, but died on his way home.

The larger network

Yāqūt al-Chīrī and Fāsī al-ṣubṭī are two important yet divergent examples of a larger flow of Africans who participated in the making of Islamic law in premodern Asia. If Sādīd represents the proper jurists and itinerant scholars, Yāqūt stands for the agents that facilitated the intellectual exchanges. There are many more similar Swahilis who worked across South and Southeast Asia during these periods in different roles and positions. Ibn Battīta, for example, also talks about one Abd al-ʿĀazz al-Makdasawī who worked as the governor of the...
island Kansalus the Maldive. During Ibn Battuta’s visit to the island, this Muslim adminstrator from Mogadishu “treated me with honour, offered me hospitality and prepared a kurdum for me” to meet the queen of the Maldive.

Also in the Maldive, Ibn Battuta visited the hospice of Shaykh Sāhil Najīb at the extremity of the island of Mahal, the seat of the Sultana and her husband, with the captain and Arab judge Tal-i-Yamānī. Andrew Forbes identifies this hospice as the Habshīgefānu Magān (‘Shrine of the African Worthy’), built in memory of Shaykh Najīb from East Africa, together with a mosque. Shaykh Najīb travelled in the Maldives teaching Islam to the islanders and died at Karendu Island in Fadhfolu Atoll. The mosque and hospice were located in the precincts of the Lonu Ziyare (‘Salt Shrine’), but they were with a mosque. Shaykh Najīb travelled in the Maldives built in memory of Shaykh Najīb from East Africa, together as the Habshīgefānu Magān (‘Shrine of the African Worthy’), judge seat of the Sultana and her husband, with the captain and Arab judge Tal-i-Yamānī. Andrew Forbes identifies this hospice as the Habshīgefānu Magān (‘Shrine of the African Worthy’), built in memory of Shaykh Najīb from East Africa, together with a mosque. Shaykh Najib travelled in the Maldives teaching Islam to the islanders and died at Karendu Island in Fadhfolu Atoll. The mosque and hospice were located in the precincts of the Lonu Ziyare (‘Salt Shrine’), but they were demolished in the early twentieth century.4 We can discern from the name of the shrine that the Shaykh was from Abyssinia, but it is difficult to make any conclusions about his origin for the want of solid evidence. The Maldive also had a share of African slaves, and seventy of them were brought in, and brought from, the Hijaz in the mid-nineteenth century by the Maldiveking Sultan Hasan III. In an interesting course of events, one of these slaves killed a local Maldvian and the qādī (judge) ordered his execution, but the sultan instead burned the judge at the stake. If we are to believe the Tellīfī, one of the early accounts of the history of the Maldive written in the eighteenth century and eventually released in 1823,5 all these instances demonstrate how mobile these Swahilis were, and that is what makes them a strong part of the Indian Ocean community. As we see in the case of Faqih Sāhil and Yāqīt, they all travelled from the East African coasts to faraway places: from Mogadishu to Mecca and Medina to China to Malabar (as Sāhil did), from Ethiopia to Bengal to Mecca to Hormuz (as Yāqīt did). The same goes for several other Swahili in the Maldive. Even if one could argue that Africans, like Yāqīt, were forced to travel across the seas by their masters or benefactors, and that they did not travel voluntarily, Faqih Sāhil, Abd al-Ādi al-Makhdum, Shaykh Sāhil Najīb and many more, all travelled for their own interests and benefits. Also, their journeys and stories provide us with a different picture about the Africans in Asia, different from the one we would get in the hitherto literatures portraying them as slaves (with subsequent political or military careers). This picture motivates us to look further into premodern Afro-Asian intellectual contacts across the Indian Ocean world, especially through the contributions by judges, lawyers, teachers, imams, and preachers.

If we discuss African Muslim scholars in premodern Asia, we cannot neglect the North African scholars who transcended the boundaries of the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean world, even though it is difficult to differentiate their contributions from the existing narratives in Islamic legal historiography, for they are very much visible across the Middle East since the early centuries of Islam. Also, the Arab vs. Berber debate is a rather complicated issue, and this only furthers once we look at the self-identification of a Berber like Ibn Battuta as an Arab during his travels.14 Leaving aside these issues, here briefly elaborate on two North African scholars who worked in the Indian Ocean world.

The first example is Ibn Battuta himself. He was appointed by the Delhi sultan Muhammad Tughluq (r. 1324-1351) as the judge of Delhi. There are not many discussions on his execution of law or his verdicts in Delhi, but the scenario changes once he arrived in the Maldive where he worked as the chief judge for one and a half years. There we get plenty of details about his attempts to change local cultures and systems according to his understanding of Islamic law. After his appointment, he asked the ladies there to cover their bodies and heads, which they refused. The execution of his version of Islamic law was met with various direct or indirect acts of resistance, demonstrating an encounter between an African-Berber-identified Arab jurist with the customs and cultures of the Indian Ocean world. Due to his harsh judgements and passing verdict against the Queen’s husband, he was forced to resign his position and leave the island.

References

New developments in South Asian archives

The Sikkim Palace Archive Digitisation Project

Alex McKay

THE INDIAN HIMALAYAN STATE of Sikkim, which separates Nepal to the west and Bhutan to the east, emerges into the historical record with the establishment of the Namgyal dynasty in the 1460s. As a Buddhist kingdom Sikkim’s closest cultural links were with their northern neighbour Tibet, but during the 19th century they were increasingly drawn into the orbit of their southern neighbour, British India. The colonial government sought to establish diplomatic and trading relations with the Tibetans as well as to secure the integrity of their northern frontier from any threat in that direction. Sikkim offered them a ‘stepping stone’ to Tibet and despite Sikkimese efforts to avoid alienating either of the two powers the British appointed a Political Officer in 1899 who ruled Sikkim under the Princely State system. A series of Political Officers then oversaw the administration of Sikkim down to Indian independence in 1947. In 1975 the 12th and final ruling Chogyal (King/Maharaja), Palden Thondup Namgyal (1923-1982), was deposed by India and Sikkim was merged into India. It exists today simply as a state of India, albeit with certain administrative distinctions.

With few exploitable resources, Sikkim was of little importance to the British during the colonial period, other than as a base for their relations with Tibet. But during the first three decades of British authority there, Sikkimese government and society underwent enormous transformations, with a reorganisation of the tax basis, the development of forestry and mining, and the introduction of Western education and health systems. Sikkim in the mid-19th century had a very small population, and around the late 1860s Sikkimese landlords had begun to employ migrant labour from Nepal in order to develop their land-holdings, and the introduction of Western education and health systems.

Prior to the merger the state archives of Sikkim were controlled by the British during the colonial period, other than as a base for their relations with Tibet. But during the first three decades of British authority there, Sikkimese government and society underwent enormous transformations, with a reorganisation of the tax basis, the development of forestry and mining, and the introduction of Western education and health systems.

The project, which is scheduled to be completed in one year, began with the team being given the necessary archival training and skill sets by Director C. Sander and Assistant Director R. Prakash from the Roja Mutiah Research Library (Chennai). Their expertise and knowledge transfer skills proved invaluable and equipped the trainee staff for future roles utilizing this or other archival material. In addition, the historical implications of the collection and relevant historical methodology were explained by the Academic Advisor on the project.

The royal archive for the 1875–1975 period comprises approximately 735 files (or approximately 95,000 folios), the overwhelming majority of which are in the English language (with some material in Hindi, Nepali, and Tibetan). Its contents reveal a great deal about the land and people of Sikkim and its complex history at the crossroads of British India and Tibetan Buddhism. They shed light on both secular and religious matters, including law, land-use, taxation, court and inter-state ritual, distinguished visitors, border formation, and domestic affairs. Among the files are such items as handwritten letters from the Viceroys of India to the Sikkimese Chogyal, applications from the burgeoning Christian community to build Sikkim’s first church, the planning and implementation of which represented and which gifts to send to Lhasa for the enthronement of the 14th Dalai Lama in 1940; prisoner lists and sentences from 1917; State Council Meeting Minute ledgers from the 1890s–1920s; and correspondence in later years with Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi in the lead up to 1975, including the full testimony given by Khatrila – a key political figure in Sikkim at the time – to India’s Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi.

Wider outcomes of the digitisation project will include online and print catalogues, augmented with a biographical database of the key figures involved in this period of Sikkimese history, a workshop for local and regional students and scholars, media coverage in local and domestic Indian media, and a series of publications in both popular and academic media. Equally significant is the provision to the local establishment of modern equipment and the training of young Sikkimese in digitisation processes and information technology storage and cataloguing, laying the groundwork for future safe storage and access provision for this and other relevant material, such as the future digitisation of the Palace photographic collection, prints, medium-format and glass-plate negatives. Given that other significant collections of historical material remain in private hands in Sikkim and that the successful operation of this project will also encourage the emergence of that material into the public domain.

This hitherto closed archive will thus provide a fundamental primary source for socio-political enquiry into Sikkimese history in the 1875–1975 period, enabling – for the first time – a balanced understanding of the history of this region. The project’s digitised material will make historical documents easily accessible to Sikkimese, allowing them as well as the broader research community to finally understand how local taxation, land holdings, social rituals, and religious milestones were enacted; and how social, cultural economic, and political developments of the region were perceived in Sikkim. This collection will provide both the details expected from a local archive and an overview of late-19th and 20th century Sikkim, introducing the characters and events that shaped the development of the kingdom and its complex history.

Alex McKay, Academic Advisor, Sikkim Palace Archive Digitisation Project (dungog@hotmail.com).

References

Sikkim has one of the highest rainfalls of any region in the world and experiences extremes of summer and winter temperatures. Factors which place paper documents at particular risk unless they are properly stored in a temperature-controlled environment.

Scholars wishing to work on the history and culture of Sikkim and its neighbours have, however, faced a number of difficulties. Prior to the merger the state archives of Sikkim were maintained by the Palace secretary’s office. As the personal possessions of the royal family the archives remained in the private keeping of that family after 1975 and were not accessible to scholarship. In addition, while the British Library holds a selection of files pertaining to the colonial period in Sikkim, the Indian government files on the region are difficult for scholars, particularly foreign researchers, to access. This is not only due to the controversial nature of the merger, but also to issues connected with India’s northern border and its security, as well as to their wide dispersal in the National Archives.

A little over a decade ago a significant part of the royal archives, primarily documents in the Tibetan language concerning the pre-colonial period in Sikkim were deposited at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology in Gangtok by the 12th Chogyal Wangchuk Namgyal. This collection was subsequently catalogued by Saul Mullard and Hissey Wangchuk.1

More recently, the royal archives of the British period around 1875–1975 have been made available for digitisation and dissemination by Chogyal Wangchuk Namgyal. Following an award by the Endangered Archives Programme, funded by Arcadia and administered by the British Library, the Sikkim Palace Archive Digitisation Project began work on this material on 1 September 2016. Project Director Pema Choejden Namgyal, a team of young Sikkimese are cataloguing, digitising the material, enabling the transfer of a complete digitised version of the archive to the eventual host organisation. These will be the British Library ( Sophia 364), the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (tibetology.net/research/projects), and Project Denjong (www.projectdenjong.com), a new non-profit organisation dedicated to making Sikkim’s history and heritage accessible to a wider audience, not least young Sikkimese who are generally unaware of their heritage. Project Denjong’s website will house access to the digitised collection, and annotated posts about specific documents and/or files will be made available on its blogs/news page.

In addition to digitising the collection, the Endangered Archives Programme will enable greatly improved storage and preservation of the original archive by relocating the material into a climate controlled environment and acid-free archival boxes. This is an important part of the project, given that the documents have been at considerable risk of decay due to the basic office conditions in which they were stored at the palace. Sikkim has one of the highest rainfall of any region in the world and experiences extremes of summer and winter temperatures. Factors which place paper documents at particular risk unless they are properly stored in a temperature-controlled environment.

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References
The ORIGIN of Roja Muthiah Research Library dates back to the 1930s. Roja Muthiah, a signboard artist from Kottayar, a small town in southern Tamilnadu, began collecting books in the early 1950s as an inspiration for his signboard business known as Roja Arts. Soon he fell in love with the books and became a bibliophile himself. Over the years, Roja Muthiah scoured bookstalls all over Tamil Nadu for treasures until his library outgrew the space in his house. Until his premature death in 1992, Roja Muthiah could be found reading, compiling, and writing amidst heaps of books, clippings, journals, and artworks in his house. With the ‘Library for Sale’ news coming in from Dr C.S. Lakkak, a visiting fellow at the University of Chicago then, Mr. James Nye, Prof. A. K. Ramanujan, Prof. Norman Cutler, Prof. Arjun Appadurai, and Prof. Ralph Nicholas from the University of Chicago (UIC) came together and decided to buy the collection. In 1994 the collection was purchased and setup in Chennai in the name of Roja Muthiah Research Library (http://www.rmrl.in). In 2004, a public trust named the Roja Muthiah Research Library Trust (RMRLT) was formed to manage and take responsibility for the library. Up until early 2016, a Memorandum of Understanding between the two entities governed the collection. Now responsibility lies entirely with the RMRL Trust.

When the Library was moved to Chennai in 1994, it comprised about 165,000 items, which have grown to 350,000 in the past two decades. The collection spans over 200 years, the earliest item being a Tamil book titled ‘Gopnappottukale Postakalan’ published in 1797. The Library collection covers a wide spectrum of subjects such as classical and modern literature, literary criticism, indigenous medicine, religion and philosophy, folklore, material by and about women, metaphysics, Gandhian studies and numerous publications of historical value. RMRL has a rich collection of research material in popular culture such as cinema, theatre and the related culture of printed works. RMRL has around 2500 cinema song books and 2000 cinema posters. In addition to books and clippings, the library collection also includes printed ephemera such as invitations of various kinds, cinema posters, clippings. Palm leaf manuscripts and gramophone records also form a part of the collection. Over the years, personal collections of A. K. Ramanujan, Lloyd and Susan Rudolph, Milton Singer, Robert Hardgrave, Gift Simomoney, Mu. Arunachalam, Iravatham Mahadevan, T. P. Meenakshi Sundaram, Champakalakshmi have been added to the collection.

As a core activity, RMRL systematically started by preserving the collection through archival microfilming and digitisation. So far, the Library has preserved more than 3,500,000 pages of rare archival material, including both in digital format and in microfilm. RMRL has acquired the necessary equipment and preservation facilities. International best standards are being followed with regard to cataloguing and preservation.

Roja Muthiah Research Library: A repository for Tamil Studies

G. Sundar

The Study | 11

East India Company Archives in Bangladesh

Rajive Rai

DURING THE PERIOD of the East India Company’s authority in Bengal, the Company stationed a ‘Collector’ in Rangpur (now in northern Bangladesh). The Collectors, of whom the most famous was Warren Hastings’ envoy to Bhutan and Tibet, George Bogle (1746-81), were responsible for the Company’s commercial relations across territory that stretched to the borders of Sikkim, Bhutan and Assam. Even though a collection of the Collectors’ records were published between 1914 and 1929, this collection has apparently not attracted scholars. Rangpur, a local archive in a remote district that has endured floods, famine and civil war, as it passed from the control of British colonial India to independent (East) Pakistan, before becoming part of Bangladesh in 1971, seemed to hold few attractions for scholars.

But browsing the entire collection of the hitherto-neglected Rangpur records promised to be of considerable value to my research on the history of Sikkim, for during the late 18th century the Rangpur Collector was the main source of political and commercial information about Sikkim, as well as Bhutan and Tibet. And Bangladesh is now not only open to scholars but – Islamic fundamentalism aside – increasingly stable and easily accessible, while the scholastic value of such regional archives is now widely recognised.

Thus I recently visited Bangladesh to enquire about this archive, thinking that even if nothing was left but inexact documents then at least I could inform other researchers of the situation there. In the Bangladesh capital, with assistance from Dhaka University professors, I began by enquiring about any other EIC archives, but the National Museum Library confirmed that all of the primary sources for the nation’s history were now held at the National Archives of Bangladesh on Syed Mubhur, Dhaka. All regional archives for the 1770-1880s period were originally collected at the National Library in 1985-86 before being transferred to the custodianship of the National Archives in 2006. Among them were the early Rangpur District Records, and as many recent records are now kept in Rangpur, I had at least discovered that there was little point in my travelling there. And indeed, the National Archives catalogue indicates that Rangpur District records for the period from July 1777 March 1849 are part of their collection comprising 116 bound volumes of documents, volumes that would surely shed considerable light on many historical processes in the region.

But, Senior Archivist Mr. Kausar Miah told me that, “we may not be able to provide all the relevant documents you need because these documents are not properly arranged and are in a process of arranging systematically”. I had the chance to enter into the record room and what I saw confirmed that without additional manpower and funding there is little prospect of that process being completed in the near future. School resources probably will wait before that material is available. In the meantime their condition is worrying, the records are not well maintained and are scattered around the record room. It is not possible to produce a full list of documents relevant to my work I returned to India.

Rajive Rai, Research Scholar, Department of International Relations, Sikkim University (rajivrai44@gmail.com).

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References

As the Paris COP21 was taking place in December 2015 the coastal city of Chennai was submerged due to unprecedented flooding, followed by a month-long rainfall. According to official figures, at least 470 people were killed. Inundation is nothing new in coastal areas, although the pace with which it is hitting us is accelerating every day. The floods remind us that we primarily live on amphibious and seasonal territories and we need new frames to understand urbanism in a mobile space.

Debjani Bhattacharyya

Soaking ecologies: Rethinking Asian urbanism

To put it simply, flooding takes place when the line separating an urban area from water is breached, or when water appears in places where it is not supposed to be. These lines of separation are not just conceptual metaphors, but they are also materialized as fortified banks, dykes, embankments and the way we plan and design our landscapes. In a recent rethinking of this relation, Dilip da Cunha and Anuradha Mathur have repeatedly pointed out that the relation between land and water is not that of hard lines of separation, but that of soaking, of gradients, rhythms and times.1

Taking this as a starting point I want to understand if there is a possibility to rethink the ecology of Asian cities, especially those located in deltas, estuaries and coastal areas. Looking back to our past we realize that cities across the world have been carved out, both technologically and legally, from the amphibious territories that we called swamp, fens, bogs, marshes. Today these wet spaces threaten to claim back our cities. These amphibious territories alert us that cities are spaces where we have cultivated a dry culture of living, building and design by initially draining the swamps to create habitable lands.

Engineering the urban landscape, especially within South Asia, began in an unprecedented way from the late eighteenth century. This was also a period of colonial encounter, where Europeans from temperate climates were confronted with tidal and tropical landscapes, which appeared to them as ‘pestilential’ and ‘miasmatic’ spaces of diseases. Initial projects of draining the landscape were as much a response to these epidemiological and sanitary concerns as they were intended for infrastructural expansion roads, canals and ports. For instance, the project of embanking Bombay began in 1784, around the same time Calcutta’s shifting and tidal landscape was fortified so that property measurements and taxes could be fixed. This trend of draining to create new lands has continued unabated till the present as we allow wetlands, swamps, lakes and ponds in our search for firm ground for the real estate market.

Reading the traces of water in the land

In the subcontinent, the repression of the hydrological landscapes of our cities have been further aggravated as infrastructural planning has moved away from elected municipal bodies to parastatal organizations operating through a neoliberal market agenda. For instance, we see that the World Bank funded the Eri Scheme in Chennai through the 1970s and 1980s, under which eris, which the scheme claimed to be ‘defunct lakes’, were permanently drained to build housing. However eris, which are a particular kind of water reservoir, were formed by natural dips in the land, especially in coastal towns of the subcontinent that received all their rainfall at once. These local forms of water management both prevented flooding, while also helping with water shortages.2 Today these disappeared waterbodies are coming back to haunt the city as coastal waters and rainfall find no escape routes, but instead flow into our houses, offices and roads in search of their old homes. By turning to the hidden and repressed hydrologies of the cities, we realize there is also a third kind of flooding, one that happens when our visions for designing the landscape is blinkered by short-term profits of real estate.

Perhaps it is time that we try to understand coastal cities not as sites of engineering but as ‘soaking ecologies’. This would demand that we imagine building and dwelling to the rhythm of the tides, of season, of wet and dry, of the ebb and flow of the tides, of waterbodies both localized and regional.3

One of the major tasks would be to read the history of the land’s relation to water by learning to read the traces of water in the land. It is within those contours and lines left by the water’s seasonal presence on land that we can re-learn how to live in these spaces. Through such a project of learning and un-learning we will be able to re-imagine our relations with the soaking ecologies, which can provide the outline for the Asian urbanism of the future.

It must be mentioned that the idea of soaking ecologies is more capacious and slightly different from the idea of ‘spongy cities’ that Chinese President Xi Jinping announced at the Central Government Conference on Urbanization in 2013. Jinping has made a significant amount of funding available to create cities that can absorb rainfall through wetlands, permeable pavements and rain gardens, to name just a few means of absorption. It is an ambitious project of reengineering the urban landscape according to top-down human design. The concept of soaking ecologies, however, begins from the premise that the landscape is mobile, and that we need to learn how to live in these mobile and temporary landscapes where what is land in December can become a sheet of water during monsoon.

An invitation

The concept is also an invitation for conversation and an opening to learn from the ground how to live on it. Therefore, we need to ask whether cities located in deltas embody specific urban forms, political constellations and modes of habitation. Whenever we think of urban forms we think in terms of a dry culture, where water emerges as floods or water-logging, and the struggle is to keep the water out of these riverine cities. More than two-thirds of the world’s largest and highly populated cities are coastal delta cities vulnerable to rising sea levels. The current conversation about these cities remains focused on climate-change adaptation and resilience in a very myopic manner. This conversation fails to move away from the top-down design and planning perspective. Conceptually, soaking ecologies ask what possible relation we might be able to imagine between urban forms and the waterbodies that used to pockmark the surface of our cities. We must first begin by understanding the soil and the various names we use to designate the varieties of soils. How many words do our languages have to define erosion and accretion? In these localized terms we will find a wealth of knowledge about land-water relations that might tell us how to inhabit the soaking ecologies: a lesson on how to not embank ourselves away from water, but to develop skills to live with it.

We have invited Jeffrey Cooper to participate in a summer school on Soaking Ecologies in the coming issues of The Newsletter. The idea of the summer school will be an opportunity to problematize the solid grounds that we take for granted in conceptualizing our urban environments, writing the cities’ pasts and designing their futures. It will open the ground for new histories, anthropologies, urban planning, architecture and policy-making about the future of coastal cities that can accommodate the seasonal nature of the earth’s surface, simultaneously making space for water and amphibious dwellings.

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References


Above: Shalimar Shipyard in Kolkata, India. This is not a flooded landspace, but what landscape architects call land¬
soaked-in-water...
Welcome to our first edition of Intersections: Asia and Australia, a recurring section in the Newsletter on Asia-related studies in Australia. It is the result of an exciting new collaboration between the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden (the Netherlands), and the Asia Institute of The University of Melbourne (Australia). Intersections is edited by Ana Dragojlovic and Edwin Jurriëns, with assistance from Andy Fuller, from the Asia Institute in Melbourne.

Edwin Jurriëns and Ana Dragojlovic

FOR INTERSECTIONS, we ask contributors to reflect on their own research interests and the broader academic field in Australia of which it is a part. We focus on current, recent or upcoming projects, books, articles, conferences and teaching, while identifying related interests and activities of fellow academics in the field. Our contributions aim to give a broad overview of Asia-related studies in Australia, after our first general edition, we will focus more specifically on themes such as language, popular culture, gender, urban development, environment and art. Intersections’ aim is to highlight exciting intellectual debates on and with Asia in the region. Our preferred style is subjective and conversational. Rather than offering fully-fledged research reports, our contributions give insight into the motivations behind and directions of various types of conversations between Asia and Australia.

Engagement with Asia at the governmental and institutional levels in Australia has been notoriously fragile. Nevertheless, the pragmatic considerations of geopolitical proximity and commercial profitability have allowed for some renewed and increased awareness of the unavoidability and positive prospects of the Asia-Pacific region. Our preferred style is subjective and conversational. Rather than offering fully-fledged research reports, our contributions give insight into the motivations behind and directions of various types of conversations between Asia and Australia.

Intersections presents a snapshot of the breadth and depth of Asia-related expertise in Australia. We are confident, however, that our selected contributions are some of the prime representatives of the field. Moreover, we hope and believe that our examples have the potential to trigger and foster conversations with Asia experts elsewhere in the world.

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Asian Studies. On disciplines and regions

Vedi Hadiz

THE FIELD OF ASIAN STUDIES is by nature inter-disciplinary: yet it would do well to also become more inter-regional. In my view, the most interesting works in Asian Studies are not only those that are deliberately located at the intersections of disciplines (e.g., politics and sociology or economics and history), rather than positioned within the conventions and orthodoxies of single disciplines, but also those with themes that focus on the intersections between different (sub)regions of Asia. Otherwise, the adjective ‘Asian’ just gets added on for the purpose of staking a geographical claim to a work, without necessarily producing fresh perspectives. Inter-regional research has the potential to better reveal social processes that could otherwise go unnoticed. I am keen to encourage those working in the field of Asian Studies, young scholars in particular, to not just think interdisciplinarily, but also inter-regionally.

I hope to have practiced some of what I preach in my own recent book, Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East (Cambridge University Press, 2016). While an interest in bringing together political economy and historical sociology guided the theoretical approach applied in the study, the comparative work dealt with cases in the Middle East (Turkey and Egypt) and Southeast Asia (Indonesia). I felt that the exercise necessitated immersion into a set of literature pertaining to a region that I had not worked on before, in this case the Middle East. My hope was that by comparing the evolution of Islamic politics in my main country of expertise, Indonesia, with the evolution of Islamic politics well beyond Southeast Asia, my research might yield different kinds of insights than would a study comparing Indonesia to, say, Malaysia or the Philippines.

In my work, I found that there were many useful comparisons to be made between Indonesian and Middle Eastern experiences, in terms of the evolution of what I call Islamic populism. Apart from the obvious fact that Indonesia, Turkey and Egypt are major Islamic-majority societies, their experiences of state formation and capitalist development, the Cold War, as well as integration into neoliberal globalisation processes, have been important in all three cases. The Cold War was pivotal in the way that Islamic forces co-opted by secular nationalist elites that held state power in battles against the Left, but were nevertheless marginalized socially and politically throughout a large part of the economic modernisation process. This meant that Islamic lenses helped to develop new worldviews in relation to the new social dislocations and contradictions that accompanied social change in these societies, especially in the phase of neoliberal globalisation.

In other words, all these countries have had social problems that can be traced to skewed development processes, to which Islamic populism can be seen as a response. These have included social disparities as expressed in the proliferation of a new urban poor as well as large cohorts of educated youths who are either unemployed or have little prospect of meaningful employment. In spite of the grand promises of modernity, their hopes of social and material advancement do not match their actual life chances. Islam came to articulate social dissent under such conditions that were furthermore marked by the decline – or in the case of Indonesia, the complete vanquishing – of the Left and the relative weakness of political liberalism. But the outcomes of these social processes and the struggles of Islamic populism would be vastly different. In Turkey, they came together eventually under the now-ruling AKP (Justice and Development Party) that gained power democratically (in spite of its current authoritarian proclivities). In Egypt, until the Arab Spring, a highly suppressed Islamic populism led by the Muslim Brotherhood dominated the political opposition and civil society for decades, but was still unable to gain control of the state. Once it did, that control only lasted briefly and would have disastrous consequences. In Indonesia, yet another distinct trajectory can be identified. This is one of the continual failures of Islamic movements to win state power or dominate political opposition in both the eras of authoritarianism and democracy.

The project of my book was therefore to examine and explain these different trajectories, which I did largely on the basis of the successes or failures of Islamic populism to forge a project underpinned by coherent cross-class alliances. I would suggest that the sort of questions the book asks would not have come about had the comparisons been undertaken with countries that share the sub-region of Southeast Asia with Indonesia.

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References

1 Research on Islamic politics in Indonesia is strongly represented in Australia by scholars such as Greg Barton, Greg Fealy and Richard Robison, among others. The University of Melbourne is well-placed to lead in Islamic studies more generally through its National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies.
Intersections: Asia and Australia

De-demonising ‘people smuggling’ between Indonesia and Australia
Antje Missbach

For the last three years, I have studied political, economic and legal aspects of so-called ‘people smuggling’ from Indonesia to Australia. Between 2009 and mid-2013, more than 50,000 asylum seekers made their way to Australia by boat, with the help of Indonesian transporters. Their arrival in Australia legitimised debates about international migration, refugee protection and national security, but also led to the adoption of more restrictive asylum policies and deterrence strategies by both Australian governments. Indonesia, as a result of pressure from Australia, has also adopted a number of policies that are detrimental to the free movement of asylum seekers and refugees, although they
tend to be ineffective in curbing the activities of smugglers.

Over the last decade, transnational people-smuggling networks have grown substantially as demand among asylum seekers and other migrants has risen. There have always been facilitators who provide services to paying customers wanting to cross international borders, but smugglers have become increasingly indispensable in the present global migration flows, especially for those whose journeys involve difficult passages such as an ocean crossing. Smuggling is now the norm rather than the exception, not least because of increasingly restrictive border regimes around the world. Now, it is often only smugglers who can facilitate (unlawful) movement into and out of countries for those escaping life-threatening situations.

In my research, I have studied different actors within Indonesia people-smuggling networks, including former (rejected) asylum seekers working as recruiters and organisers, Indonesian fishermen, over-represented among imprisoned asylum seekers in Indonesia, and members of Indonesian security forces who provide security for people-smuggling operations. To establish the social backgrounds of convicted smugglers, I have relied mostly on the verdicts of Indonesian courts. To retrace their decision-making and risk-taking strategies, I have held open interviews with smugglers during their imprisonment and after their release.

My work complements a number of recent studies on irregular migration and mobilities of asylum seekers and refugees as well as forced immobility that have been carried out by colleagues at different universities in Australia. Samantha Taylor, Amy Nethery and Brynna Rafferty-Brown have written in great detail about the lack of refugee protection and immigration detention in Indonesia. Linda Risskmian and Lucy Fiske have mapped the ‘stuckness’ of asylum seekers rendered immobile in Indonesia by current externalised Australian border policies, and long-term observers of migratory flows, such as the late Graeme Hugo, have studied the politics of limbo in Indonesia. Susan Kneebone has scrutinised the regional mechanisms, such as the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and related Transnational Crime, which are responsible for immobilising asylum seekers and refugees. Andreas Schliebenhaft and Xavier R. Gollnet have conducted a number of insightful studies on the law enforcement of anti-smuggling legislation and the prosecution of Indonesian smugglers both under Australian and Indonesian law.

Convincing hundreds of Indonesian fishermen has had no serious impact on the operational capability of any smuggling network, as willing replacements are readily available in the large pool of impoverished Indonesians. Arresting and punishing recruiters and organisers has not proven sufficient to combat people-smuggling networks more broadly, as it is also relatively easy to replace them with members of the same network or even with competitors. For now the number of asylum seeker boats leaving Indonesia has decreased, as a result of Australia’s unilateral approach of forcibly returning boats to Indonesia. The diplomatic and financial sustainability of this approach is highly questionable, as the Indonesian government has protested against it repeatedly. My findings support demands for policy-makers and opinion-leaders to shift their attention away from the facilitators of irregular migration towards the root causes of forced displacement and, thus, to eliminating the need for flight which engenders reliance on people smugglers.

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Celebrating Asian Studies in Australia
Dolly Kikon

I WORK IN NORTHEAST INDIA as a political anthropologist. Over the last fifteen years, Northeast India has become an important site for an array of scholarship. For security analysts, it is a site to study violent conflict and insurgency; human rights scholars have documented some of India’s worst cases of state violence in the region; for new fields like borderland studies the region is an important location to study transnational migrations and flows, and policy makers grapple with difficult questions about implementing development programs in militarized places. My own academic trajectory—from history, law, to anthropology—has enabled me to engage with the region in various ways. Conversations with academics, practitioners, and non-governmental organisations in the last fifteen years have allowed me to contribute towards debates about citizenship, politics, and resources both inside and outside the academy. Producing theoretically driven and ethnographically rich work means engaging with the eclectic intellectual community of scholars working on Asia and beyond. As a student of law in India, a graduate student in Hong Kong and California, a postdoctoral fellow in Sweden, and a university lecturer in Australia today, I have truly experienced the richness of Asian Studies. And scholars across Australia have offered new concepts, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks to understand the ongoing economic, social, and political developments in Asia.

In 2016, I came across two excellent monographs published by Amsterdam University Press (AUP). Beyond Bali: Southeast Asian Citizens and Post-Colonial Intimacy (Asian Heritage Series) by Ana Dragolovic, an anthropologist at the University of Melbourne, and Borderland City in New India: Frontier to Gateway (Borderland Series) by Duncan McDaid-Rea, Professor of Development Studies at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Sydney. Many exciting works on Asian Studies have been published over the last few years, but these two work stand out for two reasons. Firstly, both scholars not only connect the reader to new concepts about place-making, mobility, and belong, but also to people and regions in Asia (Bali and Northeast India) that are relatively underexplored as spaces for engaging with critical and important themes in the social sciences. Secondly, the monographs assert the importance of paying attention to interconnectedness and crossings (both geographically and socially) in order to make original contributions to the academy.

Michael Herzfeld, professor of Anthropology at Harvard University and a member of the editorial board of the Asian Heritage Series at Amsterdam University Press explained the importance of Dr Dragolovic’s work for the Heritage Series: “Our effort is to capture the dynamics of a very large continent, Asia, and the way in which scholarship has emerged here.

Europe’s presence in Asia has been quite intimate through its history of colonialism. Asia’s book is about Balinese migrants in the Netherlands, and the vagaries of the concept of Balinese-ness. Her book describes a group of people who were caught in the conflict between the colonial powers and the local majority.”

Reflecting on her ethnographic journey, Dragolovic said that the book project evolved from her doctoral dissertation at the Australian National University (ANU). Initially she was intrigued to explore how Balinese people created a particular image of uniqueness as a result of their contact with anthropologists, Euro-American artists, and the Dutch colonial state since the beginning of the twentieth century. Dragolovic noted that her encounters with Balinese interlocutors in the Netherlands “caused a major puzzle” because they were not critical about Dutch colonialism. However, it was such ethnographic surprises that enabled her to present and meticulously discuss new concepts such as postcolonial intimacy in her monograph.

The variety and breadth of scholars in Australia working on Asia is impressive, and my conversations with graduate students and prospective candidates affirm that the future of Asian Studies is a vibrant and exciting one. My encounters with Dr Dragolovic and Professor McDaid-Rea’s work give me reason to celebrate Asian Studies in Australia.

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The study of Asian art in Australia

Michelle Antoinette

STUDIES OF CONTEMPORARY ASIAN ART have flourished in Australia over the last few decades alongside the burgeoning contemporary art scene in Asia and growing global interest in contemporary Asian art. I first came to learn about contemporary Asian art in the early 1990s, at a time when Asian art had been under-researched and under-represented in Australia, and I discovered the richness of contemporary art that had been produced in both new and traditional forms. This is an exciting time to be working in this field, as the sheer volume of text continues to increase. 

One of the key features of contemporary art in Asia is its multidisciplinary nature, and the field of contemporary Southeast Asian art is a strong area of interest in Australia, especially with the recent establishment of the Asia Pacific Art Museum (APAM) in Singapore, a new research center and museum dedicated to contemporary Southeast Asian art. The APAM has been established with the support of the Singaporean government and the National Arts Council, and it aims to provide a platform for research and curatorial initiatives in contemporary Southeast Asian art. The APAM is also home to the APAM Research Library, which houses a growing collection of materials on contemporary Southeast Asian art, including artists' archives, exhibition catalogues, and critical writings. 

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in contemporary Southeast Asian art in Australia, with several major exhibitions and conference devoted to the field. These include the 'Southeast Asia: New Histories of Modern Southeast Asian Art' exhibition at the University of Melbourne, and the 'Contemporary Southeast Asian Art' conference at the University of Sydney. These events have provided a platform for researchers and practitioners to share their findings and ideas, and to explore new directions in research and practice.

The APAM has also been involved in several collaborative projects with Australian universities, and has supported a number of research and teaching initiatives. For example, the University of Melbourne has offered a range of courses in contemporary Southeast Asian art, and the APAM has provided funding for research projects and exhibitions. These initiatives have helped to promote a greater understanding of contemporary Southeast Asian art in Australia, and have contributed to the growth of the field both in Australia and internationally.

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In conclusion, the study of contemporary Southeast Asian art in Australia is a vibrant and dynamic field, with a growing interest in the region and a rich tradition of research and practice. The APAM is a key player in this field, and its ongoing efforts to promote research and teaching in contemporary Southeast Asian art are helping to shape the future of the field.

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News from Southeast Asia

The following articles come from the Regional Social Cultural Studies Programme (RSCS). The RSCS Programme studies and examines the history, sociology and anthropology of national and transnational processes within Southeast Asia. Specifically, RSCS is concerned with ethnographic practices and theory-building in the areas of contemporary histories, nation-building, ethnicity, religion, class and popular culture in the region. Key research areas are the processes of nation-building, civil society and religion, cultural globalisation and identity-making, contemporary politics, and denocратisation and multiculturalism in Southeast Asia.

China’s footprint on its neighbours

The Chinese were exporting the ‘good life’ to its periphery. They attempted to capture the complexities that arise when labour flows are pouring into these countries, as well as the answers to questions such as put forth by the Chinese investor, is to turn the 3,000 hectares of agricultural land to the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone (GT SEZ) is a case in point. Located at the border between Laos and Thailand (Ton Phueng district, Bokeo province), the zone has been operated by Chinese investors, have become single-firm zones that are badly designed and mismanaged. Failing to create further business development or employment within the zone, many SEZs are unable to generate economic growth. Furthermore, special judicial autonomy given to zone developers has created a ‘state of exception’ where coercive transformation of local resources and economy has been normalized, and dispossession and displacement depoliticized. In several zones, deprivation of local livelihoods in the name of modernization has been striking, resulting in the relocation of vast numbers of local inhabitants and direct confrontations between local communities and government officials.

The Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone (GT SEZ) is a case in point. Located at the border between Laos and Thailand (Ton Phueng district, Bokeo province), the zone has been operated by a Chinese firm, Kings Romans company, since 2007. As a border SEZ with a 75 year contract (extendable to 99 years), the aim of the zone development, as put forth by the Chinese investor, is to turn the 3,000 hectares of agricultural land into a top international casino entertainment complex, and to create a new image of a green city at the ‘drug border’ of the Golden Triangle. Such a plan is, however, not necessarily appreciated by local people and heritage preservation experts, who view this area as part of the ancient archaeological area of Suvarnakhamkham that stretches from Bo Kei in Laos to Chiang Rai’s Chiang Sam on the Thai side. While GT SEZ has been ranked as the Lao government as a successful model of SEZ, with the establishment of infrastructure and tourist facilities, and shown off by the Chinese developer as a green city at the ‘drug border’ of the Golden Triangle. Such a plan is, however, not necessarily appreciated by local people and heritage preservation experts, who view this area as part of the ancient archaeological area of Suvarnakhamkham that stretches from Bo Kei in Laos to Chiang Rai’s Chiang Sam on the Thai side. While GT SEZ has been ranked as the Lao government as a successful model of SEZ, with the establishment of infrastructure and tourist facilities, and shown off by the Chinese developer as a ‘merit making’ project to help civilize the poor Lao population, local people regard it as an encroaching process of dispossession. Resettlement of Ban Kwan village took almost four years to settle while 116 households were voluntarily forced to move to a new site. Abrupt de-peasantization has left most villagers jobless while less than 10% of the total population has been offered a job by the company, most of whom are just 15-25 years old. The majority of the working force are made up of Burmese migrant labourers, who are willing to endure exploitation under precarious working conditions. The legal authority granted to the zone has allowed a network of shadow economies to flourish and operate through the euphemism of ‘entertainment complex’; they include sex and wildlife trade industries. Interestingly, the wealth generated from this type of economy is concentrated only in the hands of a few Chinese, including the investors, their cronies, and other Chinese entrepreneurs in the zone.

Pinkaw Laungaramsi

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**Reflections of a journey on the Kunming-Hanoi Economic Corridor**

Benjamin Loh and Terence Chong

**OVER THE PAST FEW DECADES**, while Western democracies sought to limit the range of links that their people had with China, Vietnam and both countries are working to establish a border towns of Hekou in China and Lào Cai in Northern Vietnam and both countries are working to establish a 1,200km “North-South Economic Corridor” from China’s Yunnan province to Vietnam’s provinces and cities. In 2014, we travelled from Kunming to Hanoi through this China-Vietnam economic corridor highway to observe how resource and merchant trade, capital and people flows are conducted at every level, and found that only certain stretches of the highway—the Chinese side of the border and the Vietnamese part near the border—were reactivated. The highway ended abruptly about an hour into our deeper bus journey to Hanoi, and traffic was diverted to a parallel road near H'ai Phòng. The most important turn off near H'ai Phòng was the truck road to Thâm Lòi along the border town of Lào Cai along the economic corridor. "The wood is from Laos", the shop assistant reluctantly revealed after some inquiry about a set of the timber with slightly warped slabs of panels of dagon and foroa set against its back. The craftsmen, however, were from Yunnan. Apparently it is more expensive to transport unfinished or raw wood products directly from Laos to Yunnan than it is from Laos to Vietnam to Yunnan. This is because of the poor road networks between Laos and Yunnan. Teak, mahogany, and rosewood are flown from Laos to the Vietnamese province of Bạc Ninh—known for its export-driven hardwood and wood-processing industry—where they are treated, processed, and transformed into finished furniture and ornamental craft products before export to China, the United States, Europe, and Japan. As China’s factory powerhouses in its coastal provinces experience rising costs, its hinterland’s cross-border economic corridors are where lower-wage neighbouring countries like Vietnam are taking over its lower value-added production functions. However, unlike the traditional “fly-in, fly-out” model of manufacturing based on cheaper labour and greater efficiency that in the 1980s and 1990s saw the migration of factories and production facilities to China and Southeast Asia, the case of wood furniture and the trading of other commodities in the production chain has become more like a spider’s web, with components fitting in all directions and goods crossing and re-crossing borders—Lào wood is processed in Vietnam, crafted by Vietnamese workers and transported from H'ai Phòng may continue to use these truck or parallel roads to avoid toll fees as well as to service commercial or informal transit points along existing routes and towns for both formal and illegal trade.

In 2014, Yen Bách continues to be an important transit hub of Northern Vietnam. It lies on a major railway freight corridor between Vietnam and China, and a network of truck roads from Yen Bách connects to the neighbouring provinces of Hà Giang, which shares a remote and mountainous 270 km border with Yunnan province of southern China, and is a known route for the smuggling of rhino horns, elephant tusks, as well as a rare and valuable timber called Ngoc An and Son la which is a gateway province to Laos. This network of trade routes is expected to compete with the Lào-Li River Highway, which is more direct and time-saving route to Hanoi and H’ai Phòng. Intensified smuggling and illicit trading activities are also rampant in the two border towns. Vietnamese boatmen smuggle local rice and raw materials like rubber and bauxite along the Red River under cover of night across to Yunnan. Concomitantly, we were informed that thousands of goods from Yunnan into Vietnam include vegetable and pesticides. Machinery from China is dismantled and their parts smuggled across the border, to Vietnam's interior and transported using the larger scale smuggling over the Gulf of Tonkin. Large amounts of coal and bauxite are transported this way. There were also an array of furniture shops selling wooden furniture and woodcarvings in the border town of Lào Cai along the economic corridor. "The wood is from Laos", the shop assistant reluctantly revealed after some inquiry about a set of the timber with slightly warped slabs of panels of dagon and foroa set against its back. The craftsmen, however, were from Yunnan. Apparently it is more expensive to transport unfinished or raw wood products directly from Laos to Yunnan than it is from Laos to Vietnam to Yunnan. This is because of the poor road networks between Laos and Yunnan. Teak, mahogany, and rosewood are flown from Laos to the Vietnamese province of Bạc Ninh—known for its export-driven hardwood and wood-processing industry—where they are treated, processed, and transformed into finished furniture and ornamental craft products before export to China, the United States, Europe, and Japan. As China’s factory powerhouses in its coastal provinces experience rising costs, its hinterland’s cross-border economic corridors are where lower-wage neighbouring countries like Vietnam are taking over its lower value-added production functions. However, unlike the traditional “fly-in, fly-out” model of manufacturing based on cheaper labour and greater efficiency that in the 1980s and 1990s saw the migration of factories and production facilities to China and Southeast Asia, the case of wood furniture and the trading of other commodities in the production chain has become more like a spider’s web, with components fitting in all directions and goods crossing and re-crossing borders—Lào wood is processed in Vietnam, crafted by Vietnamese workers and transported from H'ai Phòng may continue to use these truck or parallel roads to avoid toll fees as well as to service commercial or informal transit points along existing routes and towns for both formal and illegal trade.

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Tourism in Korea, China, and Japan

Kyuhoon Cho

FOR MANY, travel is a measure of the quality of life. It is an activity people may engage in to make up for something lacking in everyday life, to find balance with a daily routine revolving around work. Travel acquires a variety of meanings in the lives of people today—from personal to socio-cultural. In addition to being an escape from the ordinary and a reprieve from their busy schedules, travelling allows them to experience diverse cultures, meet local people, discover new aspects of themselves in unfamiliar surroundings, and explore alternative lifestyles found in different cultural environments. In this way, the actions, impressions, and expectations of tourists reflect their identities, self-perceptions, and social aspirations.

The three essays below describe the signifying practices of East Asian tourists, analyze the diverse objectives and social effects of trips taken by foreign travelers in China, and investigate other related issues. Myungkoo Kang and Eun-Young Nam categorize the meanings attached by Chinese visitors to their travels in Korea into three types of ‘gazes’: patriotic-developmental, consumerist-cosmopolitan, and analytical-introspective. Ryosuke Okamoto offers a new perspective on ‘contents tourism’ using the case of the ‘Tomb of Christ’ (southern Aomori Prefecture, Japan) as a representative example of a tourist site that is obviously inauthentic. Linking tourism with migration, Yucheng Liang examines the differences between tourists from developing and developed countries who visit Guangzhou, China, by looking at their goals and local social networks.

Kyuhoon Cho, Regional Editor of ‘News from Northeast Asia’; Research Fellow, Seoul National University Asia Center (icho28@snu.ac.kr).

Geographical imaginaries and travel experiences of Chinese youke in Seoul

Myungkoo Kang and Eun-Young Nam

OVERSEAS TRAVEL BY CHINESE TOURISTS, referred to as youke (遊客) in Chinese, was liberalized in March 1997. Since 2009, the Seoul National University Asia Center (SNUAC) has been proposing new contents and perspectives on Asia by integrating regional and thematic research across Asia. SNUAC seeks to be the leading institution for research and scholarly exchanges. SNUAC features three regional centers, the Korean Social Science Data Archive (KOSDA), and seven thematic research programs. By fostering ‘expansion’ and ‘layering’ between Asian studies and Korean studies, the Center endeavors to shape new frameworks of Asian studies that go beyond a ‘Western-non-Western’ dichotomy. SNUAC will continue to support the pursuit of scholarly excellence in the study of Asia by providing opportunities to conduct international collaboration on an array of topics in Asia research.

For further information please visit: http://snuac.snu.ac.kr/center_eng

News from Northeast Asia

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Authentic fakes: the case of the Tomb of Christ in Japan

Ryoysuke Okamoto

As a representative example of a tourist site that is obviously unauthentic, the case of the Tomb of Christ (Kirisuto no haka) in Shingō Village (信光村) of Sonnahoe District (鶯河町), located in the south of Aomori Prefecture (青森県) in Japan offers a new perspective on ‘contents tourism’ (also known as media-induced tourism). Positioned roughly 30 km to the west of an important regional center, Hachinohe City (八戸市), Shingō Village stretches along the country road connecting Hachinohe with Lake Towada (湖東湖). Its population has been shrinking since the 1970s, with the current number of residents recorded at 2,679 (March 2016). And in this small village, a peculiar legend of Jesus has been handed down for generations. Its legend has its roots in the Takasuihoku Documents (竹内支帳), one of the most famous hoaxes in the history of modern Japan. According to the legend, Jesus Christ returned to Judea to teach after spending his youth in Japan; he escaped persecution by fleeing back to Japan, where he lived until his death. The place where the legend claims he was buried gained the spotlight as a tourist attraction thanks to the Kirisuto Matsuri (Christ Festival, クリストフ祭り), a memorial service for Jesus Christ held on the first Sunday of June every year since 1964. Given that Shingō has fewer than 3,000 residents, it is remarkable that an estimated number of over ten thousand tourists, over 30% of whom are foreigners, visit the village every year. Most of the foreign tourists come to see the tomb and their contribution to the local economy is significant. Despite media attention for the tomb and its fame as a 4th-grade tourist spot, it has never been argued that the place is authentic. On the contrary, the majority of local residents and tourists recognize that the Tomb of Christ in Shingō is a fake. A large number of tourists visiting the tomb do so out of curiosity. They obtain information about the occult practice from the internet or magazines and come to the village to enjoy the forged nature of the tomb or the exorcism of the festival. Many want to experience the unique space created by the festival, regardless of the tomb’s authenticity, or lack thereof. There is, of course, a minority of tourists who believe that the legend is true.

In general, the authenticity of a tourist attraction is an important factor directly related to the site’s capacity to lure tourists. But in this case, Shingō is “worth seeing”, tourists flock even to difficult to reach places. Especially in the case of historical sites, to what extent the place has preserved its original appearance is important. Where repairs or maintenance has been performed, the key to preserving a site’s value is in meticulous scientific examination of its historical authenticity.

In contrast, the Tomb of Christ in Shingō has its very origins in a forged document, and therefore it could not claim any historical or scientific authenticity even from the very beginning. The fact that both the local residents and tourists are aware of this is particularly intriguing. There are instances where the Tomb of Christ has been mentioned in critical terms, as a suspicious fake tourist site or as an evidence of mercantilism. However, this case demonstrates an example of the pursuit of a kind of authenticity distinct from traditionally accepted historical authenticity in the process of developing a tourist destination.

Instances of authenticity deriving from the fake and the consequent formation of the sense of community can be observed in other cases of modern tourist culture as well. Contents tourism, such as visiting movie sets and places appearing in animation films, has become a major object of investigation in tourism studies. Uno Tsunehiro (宇野敦彦) defines contents tourism as an infusion of color into an ordinary space or the tangible transformation of an ordinary space into a special one by fictionalizing a part of reality through the introduction of a forged history. Such a process of sanctifying an ordinary place based on a forged history took place in Shingō Village. In this respect, the case of the Tomb of Christ in Japan can be seen as an example of thriving contents tourism and valuable material for the study of a new focus of modern tourism, festival events.

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Reference

The spatial occurrence of international tourism: China's experience

Yucheng Liang

We used a survey (Center for Social Surveys of National Management Institute, Sun Yat-sen University, 2016) targeting foreigners who entered China through the immigration offices of Guangzhou and Foshan to analyze the relationship between entry for tourism and entry for other reasons. The results demonstrated a difference between visitors from developing countries and visitors from developed countries. To the former, tourism is the only purpose of entry in the majority of cases, whereas people from developing countries rarely have a singular purpose. The fact is that the respondents from developing countries come to China to travel, to work in a local office of their home company, to work for a Chinese company, or to search for business opportunities, and this shows that they have multiple purposes, most of which are related to economic reasons.

The social networks of migrants serve as a source of information on the travel destination in many ways. They reduce moving costs, alleviate difficulties in adapting to the local culture, and help migrants to find jobs in the new location. In this respect, the social capital of respondents from developing countries grows in China. The multiple purposes they have when entering the country lead them to engage with different kinds of people more actively, and this, in turn, promotes the creation and accumulation of social capital locally.

Furthermore, such migrants soon gain the ability and motivation to invite friends and family from their home countries to China. Seen from this perspective, compared to tourists from developed countries, visitors from developing countries make a more important contribution to the steady growth of local social capital, which leads to a cumulative causal effect. Therefore, there is mutual influence between tourism and the economic purposes of entry by tourists from developing countries. After their arrival, we can observe the expansion of local social networks and social capital.

We hope that this study will enrich readers’ understanding of foreign tourism in China and, particularly, the behavior of visitors from developing countries.

Yucheng Liang, Professor at Sun Yat-sen University (yucheng@mail.sysu.edu.cn).

Reference
1. Migrant tourism refers to the phenomenon of tourists, who just like the migrants, are employed or participate in commercial activities beyond the purpose of tourism.
India-China Links

Tansen Sen

China’s connections to South Asia date back to the first millennium CE, when itinerant Buddhist monks, the circulations of ritual objects and commodities, and the rendition of Indic texts into Chinese led to the creation of unique linkages across the Asian continent. These connections and linkages continued, albeit transformed through commercial expansions and the spread of European colonial domination, during the second millennium. The opium trade and the wars that ensued triggered the formation of new networks of intellectual exchanges and the publication of a wide array of Indian and Chinese writings about each other in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

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China-India Academic Programs

The China-India Studies Program at the Harvard-Yenching Institute

THE HARVARD-YENCHING INSTITUTE has recently developed a joint doctoral fellowship program that seeks to bring together and train the next generation of scholars of Indian studies in China and scholars of Chinese studies in India. This new program, facilitated by the participation of the Institute for Chinese Studies in Delhi and four partner institutions in China (Fudan University, Peking University, Sichuan University, and Yunnan University), is open to those in all fields of the humanities and social sciences.

Chinese Studies in India & Indian Studies in China

Each year a small number of promising doctoral candidates in Chinese Studies at Indian universities will be selected for the joint doctoral fellowship program. In addition to their doctoral studies in India, funded by the Indian side, participants are eligible for two years abroad, funded by the Harvard-Yenching Institute. One year of HYI support will be spent at a host institution in China to receive advanced Chinese language training and interdisciplinary training in Chinese studies. After the year in China, program participants will be eligible to spend one year in residence at the Harvard-Yenching Institute for dissertation research and writing. The program’s host institutions in China will also be invited to nominate a small number of outstanding doctoral students or younger faculty members in Indian studies to come to HYI as Visiting Fellows or Visiting Scholars. Selected candidates will then be invited to spend one year in residence at the Harvard-Yenching Institute for dissertation research and writing.

Career and Funding Opportunities

Career and funding opportunities for doctoral students interested in this program can be found in the “India-China Academic Programs” section on the HYI website. For more information contact: Lindsay Strogatz, Program Manager of the Harvard-Yenching Institute (strogatz@fas.harvard.edu).

The Center for Gandhian and Indian Studies at Fudan University

THE CENTER FOR Gandhian AND Indian Studies established at Fudan University in 2015 is a platform for comprehensive and interdisciplinary Gandhian and Indian Studies. It aims to integrate the strength and resources of Gandhian and Indian Studies throughout the university, and communicate with scholars from China and abroad. It focuses on studies about Gandhi’s ideology and social practices, Indian economy, politics and foreign relations, as well as Indian language, religion and culture, including studies related to Buddhism and historical contacts between India and China in this context.

The Center for Gandhian and Indian Studies endeavors to establish the discipline of Indian Studies at Fudan, to cultivate talents of Gandhian and Indian Studies, to promote exchange and communication between Chinese and Indian academicians as well as people from all walks of life to enhance mutual understanding between Chinese and Indian people.

The Center has already commenced publication under the book series entitled Indologia et Studia India. Recent books include Zheng Weihong’s Studies in Buddhist Logic and Yang Minjun’s edited volume Nyāyamukha, Festschrift for Prof. Weihong Zheng. On 10-11 December 2016, in collaboration with the International Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) in India, the Center organized the international conference ‘Indo-Chinese Cultural Relations: Through Buddhism Path of Transcendence’. The Center invites global scholars for long and short-term visits to Fudan University.

For more information contact: Zhou Liu 周蕊, Director of the Center for Gandhian and Indian Studies at Fudan University (liuzhen@fudan.edu.cn).

The India China Institute at The New School

ESTABLISHED IN 2005, the India China Institute (ICI) at The New School supports research, teaching, and discussion on India, China, and the United States, with special focus on making comparisons and understanding interactions between the three countries as well as their joint impact on the rest of the world. ICI is the hub of an international network of scholars, researchers, and opinion-makers. Through fellowships, courses, public events, publications, and collaboration with a wide range of institutions around the world, ICI promotes academic and public understanding of issues of contemporary relevance to India-China studies.

Sacred landscapes of India and China

For the past three years, ICI has been conducting research across India, Nepal and China as part of its ‘Sacred Landscapes and Sustainable Futures in the Sacred Himalaya Initiative’, supported by the Henry Luce Foundation. ICI has been exploring the complex relationships between Lake Manasvarat and Mount Kailash – two sacred sites in Western Tibet – and the diverse faith communities from across South Asia who undertake pilgrimages to visit and worship these sites. The project has tried to better understand how local communities are adapting to a range of issues, from climate change and new economic pressures brought about by globalization to the changing geopolitical border realities. This new work will be presented later this year at the ‘Mountains and Sacred Landscapes Conference’ (20-21 April 2017) in New York City.

Fostering scholar-leaders in India and China

Another exciting project ICI is leading is our recently launched ‘China India Scholar-Leaders Initiative’, which will bring together emerging young scholars from India, China and the US focused on the theme of ‘Prosperity and Inequality in China and India’. By combining advanced academic capacity-strengthening with fieldwork and research-mentoring, this new initiative seeks to deepen the field of India-China Studies and provide much-needed academic and organizational support to young scholars. Fellowships will spend 18 months developing new research for publication while expanding their professional networks across India, China and the US.

The great urban transformations of China and India

In addition to these two important projects, ICI is also establishing a unique research and policy collaboration on urbanization. ‘The Great Urban Transformations of China and India: Implications for Equity and Livelihoods’ is an initiative that has been supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the China Economic Research Institute. Through a series of collaborative projects in China, India, and the US, the Center seeks to bring together researchers, urban practitioners, and policymakers to think creatively about how urban policies and practices in these two regions can address more closely the problems of urban inequities and the proliferation of precarious urban jobs and livelihoods. To learn more about this and other India-China related efforts visit the India China Institute’s website: https://www.indiachinainstitute.org. You can also follow us on Twitter @india_china.

For more information contact: Ashok Gurung, Senior Director of the India China Institute at The New School (gurunga@newschool.edu)
Sankrit Studies at Peking University

THE ORIGINS OF SANKRIT STUDIES at Peking University can be traced back to 1921, when the German scholar Alexander von Stael-Holstein created a Sanskrit course for Peking University students. After him, Walter Liebenzol, also a German, taught this course in the 1920s. The course was later renewed by the noted intellectuals Lin Lioukuang and Wu Xiaoling. In 1946, after returning from India, Ji Xianlin took on this task and completed the translation of the Indian epic Mahabharata and made major contributions to the study of Sanskrit poetry. In 1978, shortly after the Cultural Revolution, Ji Xianlin became the vice president of Peking University and the director of the Institute of South Asian Studies, established jointly by Peking University and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Since then, the Institute System of Sanskrit and Pali have been offered at Peking University. As of now, Peking University remains the only institute where a comprehensive program in Sanskrit and Pali is offered to undergraduate and graduate students. Additionally, minor options are available in Tibetan language and literature. In 2004, the Research Institute of Sanskrit Manuscripts and Buddhist Literature was established at the university. The Institute System of Sanskrit is a disciplinary scope to new areas, including Tibetan and Sanskrit manuscript studies, and the translation and interpretation of Sanskrit, Khotanese and Khotanese documents found in Xinjiang. Three series of publications have been launched, including the Institute Proceedings, which are included in the series on Sanskrit manuscripts and Buddhist literature and on Buddhist texts in Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese languages. In 2009, an MPhil was signed with DharmaMaici Institute in the United Kingdom to bring a DharmaMaici to Chinese. The main idea behind this project is to introduce the Pali Buddhist canon to the Chinese audience and to develop an educational program on the Pali Buddhist tradition at Peking University. This effort has resulted in the publication of the Buddhist text DighaKap. In 2012.

For more information contact Associate Professor Shaoyong YE (ye_shaoyong@pku.edu.cn) or Assistant Professor JingFan FAN (fan_jingjing@pku.edu.cn) at the Dept of South Asian Studies at Peking University.

West Heavens: India-China cultural exchange program

West Heavens is an integrated cross-cultural exchange program. It aims to untangle and compare the different paths of modernity taken by India and China, to facilitate high-level communication between the two countries’ intellectual and artistic circles, and to promote interaction through social thoughts and contemporary art. Since 2010, the program has organized more than 100 events including forums, exhibitions, film screenings and workshops, and published more than ten books.

China tour with Amitav Ghosh

In Fall 2016, West Heavens curated a one-month visit to China with Indian writer Amitav Ghosh, in collaboration with NYU Shanghai and the publishers of the Chinese editions of An Antique Land and River of Smoke. Ghosh’s travel covered major cities throughout China – including Kunming, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Beijing and Shanghai – giving talks on the relation between history and writing, the Opium Wars and India-China trade relations. Ghosh also met with local authors, critics, press, and in particular with Chinese readers, and presented at two major book fairs, Beijing Book Fair and Shanghai Book Fair. In addition, West Heavens curated a Youth Round Table on history and writing, in Minfu Library in Shanghai, with Amitav Ghosh and young writers, artists, and researchers from inside and outside of academia. During his talks and roundtables, Ghosh left the Chinese readers with a vivid impression of a contemporary Indian literature. Indian literature is not sufficiently translated into Chinese, and only those who won major Western literature prizes have so far attracted the attention of Chinese publishers. The question of how and why certain literature should be introduced to readers shall be further discussed among academics, critics, publishers and readers.

For more information contact: Yun CHEN (chenyunyumei@qq.com).
IN JANUARY 1924, copies of the newspaper Hindu Jagao were seized by the Shanghai Municipal Police (S.M.P.) at the headquarters of the Hindus Association in Rue du Consulat, in the French Concession of Shanghai. The editor of this newspaper, Harbak Singh – viewed as the ring-leader of the Indian nationalist movement in Shanghai – was then charged with publishing ‘seditionary’ papers that would result in a breach of public peace. The evidence of this charge lay in an article, entitled, "One who seeks the blood of his brethren for his own aggrandisement". The article blamed a jenmer [Inspector] of the Sikh branch of the S.M.P., Buddha Singh, for using the Gurudwara’s [Sikh place of worship] money to buy gifts for his officers in order to astound them. It alleged, “outwardly [Buddha Singh] seems to love his people, but inwardly, he is against them and on the side of the government”. Why was Buddha Singh regarded as a traitor by the nationalists? And in what way does Buddha Singh’s personal story shed light on the Indian nationalist struggle as well as the political landscape of the 1920s?

Buddha Singh was born in the Majha region of the Punjab in the 1870s. He came to Shanghai and joined the S.M.P. as a conscript in February 1903, according to the Terms of Service for the Indian Branch of the S.M.P., a conscript had to stay in Shanghai for five years. If he was not killed in action, he could be promoted to the rank of Havildar [Sergeant] and it was nearly impossible for a common conscript to obtain the position of Jemadar, the highest rank for any Sikh serving in the S.M.P. Buddha Singh wascroft to this fate. Apart from completing his own work in an exemplary way, he also performed as the treasurer of the local Sikh community and was actively involved in organizing religious festivals, such as Vaisakhi. For his contribution, Buddha Singh was conferred the title of Sirdar Sahib, the most honorable title a Sikh had ever been offered in Shanghai. To glorify this achievement, all high-profile British officials and officials of the S.M.P. attended the ceremony in the British Consulate General. A procession was followed by mounted Sikh police, mounted police personnel, and Sikh Boy Scouts, who were held to greet the titleholder. The British Consul-General, Sir Everard Fraser, presented the insignia to Buddha Singh in person.

When World War I broke out, Buddha Singh felt the expenditure was a blessing in disguise. In 1914, he began to investigate the circulation of the ‘seditionous’ Ghadar newspaper in Shanghai and found out that they were distributed by seven Ghadar Party members, who were also responsible for recruiting local Sikhs and transporting them to India. Buddha Singh forwarded the details of these men to the S.M.P., adding that those involved should be arrested. Aided to a possible British crackdown, Ghadrists burned all copies of the newspaper and fled from Shanghai.

To counter the propaganda of the Ghadar Party, Buddha Singh took measures to reinforce Sikh loyalty to the British Empire in Shanghai. On 27 November 1915, he presided over the anniversary of the birth of Guru Nanak Singh on the North Schuan Road Gurudwara, in which a resolution was passed that called on all Sikhs in Shanghai to express their loyalty to the British Raj and to devote their energy and means to assist the British government in the war. To strengthen patriotism and to nurture the sense of obedience amongst young Sikhs, Buddha Singh helped to set up the Shanghai Sikh Scout Troop in August 1917. Additionally, he initiated a movement to exhort Sikhs in Shanghai to donate money to the Red Cross in India for the benefit of wounded Sikh soldiers who were loyal and had fought for the British Empire during the war. Buddha Singh’s work outweighed the efforts of the Ghadar Party in Shanghai. During the War, not a single case of insubordination was reported and the discipline of the Sikh police unit was judged to be “excellent” by the Annual Report (1917) of the Shanghai Municipal Council. An illustration for his contribution, Buddha Singh was conferred the title of Sirdar Sahib, the most honorable title a Sikh had ever been offered in Shanghai. To glorify this achievement, all high-profile British officials in Shanghai attended the ceremony in the British Consulate General. A procession was followed by mounted Sikh police, mounted police personnel, and Sikh Boy Scouts, who were held to greet the titleholder. The British Consul-General, Sir Everard Fraser, presented the insignia to Buddha Singh in person.

The honor, however, was now turned its side of the coin. Buddha Singh’s influence and his stubborn attitude toward the Indian nationalists also brought him great troubles. On the morning of 15 July 1914, days after Buddha Singh forwarded the name list of seven ‘seditionists’ to the S.M.P., he was assaulted with a heavy stick by an ex-policeman, Lal Singh, an alleged Ghadar member who turned out to be a friend of those on the list. Ten days later, he was attacked again by three alleged Ghadrists who knocked him down and tried to blind him by fiercely attacking his eyes and head. Buddha Singh was so seriously injured that he was unconscious for several days. Buddha Singh also faced repeated threats against his life. In June 1914, he received a letter from the Ghadar Party that threatened to kill him for his disloyalty to the Indian people. On 3 October 1923, when he was on a ship bound for Hong Kong, four Sikhs informed him that one day, someone would kill him and that the killer was willing to become a martyr for the cause. Buddha Singh understood that these threats were real and told his friends on numerous occasions that he would meet the fate of being assassinated by these revolutionaries, a prophecy that came true.

Indeed, to create disturbance among Sikh policemen in Shanghai and to support the Chinese nationalist revolution, the Ghadar Party harbored a plan to assassinate Buddha Singh. On the morning of 6 April 1927, a Cadhary Party member, Harbant Singh, shot Buddha Singh dead in front of the gate of the Central Police Station in the International Settlement of Shanghai.

The assassination of Buddha Singh appalled the British authorities, within two months of the assassination almost all important Chadarists were put into custody. Furthermore, the British decided to improve the salaries and living conditions of the Sikhs in Shanghai. Ironically, this episode bears little significance to modern Chinese history or its scholars, yet when interpreted from a transnational approach it can shed light on how Indian nationalist movements, the Ghadar movement in particular, developed in Shanghai from the 1910s to the 1920s and how their anti-British conspiracies were intertwined with the international communist movement and the Chinese nationalist revolution. In effect, the Ghadar movement, and in particular their assassinate of the concept of Asia, came to rise in the late 1920s and early 1930s to the formation of the British trans-regional surveillance network, to check the flow of Indian dissenters from North America to India through Southeast and East Asia.

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Authoritarian collectivism: The origins and course of New Order Ideology

David Bourchier’s monograph makes a significant contribution to Indonesian studies by placing the ideological origins of the New Order state in a rigorously historized transnational context. Organicist conceptions of authoritarian collectivism that inspired Sukarto’s Pancasila Democracy can ultimately be traced to the Anti-Enlightenment sentiments of European Romanticism. The deep humiliations suffered by German-speaking Central Europe at the hands of the Napoleonic war machine elicited a highly emotive reaction amongst social thinkers who found the primordial bonds of blood and soil to be far superior to the positivist individualism that embodied legal-rationalist discourse.


Authoritarianism, with its emphasis on competitiveness and the protection of individual rights, was regarded as an artificial division within the organism entity. The class conflicts and inequities that came with liberal ideologies were entirely unnatural. The same was true of socialist solutions to capitalist problems. Component parts could not turn against each other because they were all elements of a unified whole. Instead of perpetuating internal conflict, organicist ideas meant the social cohesion of the organism by emphasizing the essential function each component part of the body politic had to play in serving the commonweal.

Bourchier stresses that the unification and growing power of Germany during the second half of the 19th century caused its ideological notions of national community to seep into neighboring states. The Dutch gradually disengaged from their liberal French intellectual heritage and incorporated organicist thinking into elite institutions of higher learning. Law faculties were particularly influenced by notions communal collectivism. These perceptions were only strengthened by colonial knowledge systems. Colonial intellectuals claimed that colonial sovereignty created a single nation. Indigenous elites sent to complete their education in the Netherlands thus immersed themselves in a colonial discourse that lauded the ‘primordial’ culture of the colonized. Whatever the merits of these pseudo-historical musings, the debates in question remained highly arcane to the elites sent to complete their education in the Netherlands thus immersed themselves in a colonial discourse that lauded the ‘primordial’ culture of the colonized.

In Indonesia’s case, internal conflict had to be circumvented for the sake of national development from 1945 onwards. The Dutch attempted to reassert their control over the archipelago, they were faced with a heavily mobilized indigenous population determined to resist a return to colonial rule. As Bourchier admits, this is all very well understood and these sections of his monograph are more than a summation of established views than a revision of accepted narratives (Chapter 4). Yet, he emphasizes the fact that most right-wing Indonesian nationalists who embraced organicist ideologies did so because they wanted to join a broad community of authoritarian states. Liberal democracy with its selfish individualism was in retreat across the globe and its appeal declined across the globe and its appeal declined.

In Indonesia, the narratives of the Dutch occupation were subsequently exploited to produce a feed-forward effect. The construction of a single national identity through the transposition of organicist tracts were readily exported to its colonial possessions. Indonesia proved no exception to this general trend. Wartime mobilization needs prompted Japanese administrative modalities within the Netherlands. This had previously been left to their own devices. The construction of this steel frame of administrative power was long and arduous. The sharp tilt to the left in 1963 together with the growing working class radicalism. The French Revolution and Napoleonic eras not only established the foundations of modern liberal thought, they also helped to shape a time of intellectual ferment in Indonesia, nearly 20 years of French occupation radically altered the French Revolution and Napoleonic eras not only established the foundations of modern liberal thought, they also helped to shape a time of intellectual ferment in Indonesia. Bourchier’s army of the grass roots revolutionists and eventual seizure of control again conforms to standard narratives. Much more interesting is his account of the essential role played by military lawyers in converting political parties into disciplined organicist groups. A number of these officials were heavily influenced by Catholic integralist doctrines that emanated from the 20th century papal pronouncements aiming at growing working class radicalism. Others were inspired by corporatist strategies of social demobilization occurring in a Cold War Latin American context. In Indonesia’s case, internal conflict had to be circumvented for the sake of national development from 1945 onwards. The Dutch attempted to reassert their control over the archipelago, they were faced with a heavily mobilized indigenous population determined to resist a return to colonial rule. As Bourchier admits, this is all very well understood and these sections of his monograph are more than a summation of established views than a revision of accepted narratives (Chapter 4). Yet, he emphasizes the fact that most right-wing Indonesian nationalists who embraced organicist ideologies did so because they wanted to join a broad community of authoritarian states. Liberal democracy with its selfish individualism was in retreat across the globe and its appeal declined across the globe and its appeal declined.

The most worrying finding in Bourchier’s analysis comes in an extensive epilogue which contends that while the New Order may have died politically its ideological tenets have seen a revival in recent years. The calls for social-economic inequalities that typified Soeharto’s Yudhoyono’s presidency generated tremendous resentment among the tens of millions of ordinary Indonesians that benefited from the gains of growth. The oligarchic populism that nearly brought Prabowo Subianto to power (Eplogue). Governments led by technocrats experts who claim to know what is best for people with whom they have little in common have generated understandable anger within electorates across the globe. Hence, the underprivileged search for candidates who will at least give voice to their grievances. Thus, Suharto’s most important legacy for the future of Indonesia might be an ideological one. The precepts of authoritarian collectivism he did much to embed into systems of social thought ought long to outlast a former First Family now seemingly gone to seed.

New Order modalities of domination

There is no denying that Bourchier has written an important book. By focusing on processes of ideological formation, it is an important counterweight to thoroughly statist Administrative interpretations of the New Order. However, it might have been even more interesting if Bourchier had engaged in a deeper discussion of the lineages of Indonesian state power. The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras not only established the foundations of modern liberal thought, they also helped to shape the construction of the steel frame of administrative power was long and arduous. The sharp tilt to the left in 1963 together with the growing working class radicalism. Bourchier stresses that once the economy had been placed on a path of high development, indubitably aided by the Dutch institutional heritage and corporatist strategies of social demobilization occurring in a Cold War Latin American context. In Indonesia’s case, internal conflict had to be circumvented for the sake of national development from 1945 onwards. The Dutch attempted to reassert their control over the archipelago, they were faced with a heavily mobilized indigenous population determined to resist a return to colonial rule. As Bourchier admits, this is all very well understood and these sections of his monograph are more than a summation of established views than a revision of accepted narratives (Chapter 4). Yet, he emphasizes the fact that most right-wing Indonesian nationalists who embraced organicist ideologies did so because they wanted to join a broad community of authoritarian states. Liberal democracy with its selfish individualism was in retreat across the globe and its appeal declined across the globe and its appeal declined.
Studies on marriage migration have traditionally focused on women travelling from less developed countries in the global south to more developed ones in the global north. The focus of studies in the 1990s, on brides moving from the global south to the global north in pursuit of higher economic standing, has nonetheless created a foundation for future studies on marriage migration to build upon. *Marriage Migration in Asia: Emerging Minorities at the Frontiers of Nationhood* exceeds the initial efforts of this tradition in many ways. The 10 essays in this volume provide insights into marriage migration studies and their relationship with nation-states’ migration laws. The essays push the field further by calling attention to the multiple directions marriage migration takes, making contributions in at least two domains.

**Cristina Lacomba**

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The second contribution is the focus on the role of migration laws with respect to international marriage, and the strategies that surface as a result of marriage migrants trying to live the lives they long for, which at times have unforeseen detrimental consequences for their children and families. For instance, in Chapter Five, Sari K. ihii focuses on the case of Japanese-Thai children whose Japanese nationality works against them when they return to Thailand, following their Thai mothers’ decision to raise them there. In Chapter Six, Caesar Daoedin shows how the descendants of mixed marriages between Caucasian men and Malay women give up their ethnicity as Caucasians upon recognising the social, political and economic benefits bestowed by the Malay nation-state on those assuming a Malay identity.

In addition to these contributions, one of this book’s most important points is that marriage migration sometimes occurs at the margins of state registration procedures, creating important adverse consequences for the individuals involved. Chapters seven through ten emphasise that marriage migrants without citizenship fall into very vulnerable situations after marriage, and are often unable to achieve their goals in either the sending or the receiving nation-states. This is exemplified in Chapter Seven, where Caroline Grillet writes about Vietnamese women and their children living in the borderlands between Vietnam and China. These women end up living a ‘non-existing life’ from the perspective of the Chinese state, as in China they are considered illegal economic migrants. Consequently, their marriages to Chinese men and their children’s births are not registered. Similarly, in Chapter Eight, Hien Anh Le illustrates how children born in Korea of marriages between Korean men and Vietnamese women live in a position of ‘de facto statelessness’ when their mothers move to Vietnam after divorcing their Korean husbands. In Vietnam, the children lack citizenship and other social rights. Lara Chen (Chapter Nine) and Chatchai Chetsumon (Chapter Ten) further show how state depite stateless individuals and their children of citizenship rights that would otherwise be accessible to them through marriage.

Theoretically, this book provides clear insights into the multiple dimensions and tensions that arise from the relationship between cross-border marriages and a state’s interest in controlling its population. Some authors in the West have seen in universalistic discourses on human rights a decline in the power of nation-state boundaries (Saksa Sassen, Losing Control?: Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization, Columbia University Press, 1990; Nguenhong Minh, Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Although their insights have value in some cases, the context of the European Union and in cases of a category of global diaspora contributes to furthering the understanding of the multiple situations in which marriage migrants may find themselves, and additional information would provide support to this valuable claim.

Pundits of marriage migration and citizenship will find in this collection of essays a key piece for the field. Policy experts, migration and migrant’s advocates and their organisations will value these essays for the empirical data they provide, which may be used to advocate among state agents for better policies that will allow marriage migrants to improve their lives. These case studies will also prove useful to scholars invested in researching and teaching the relationship between the law and gender together with migration, citizenship and globalisation.

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- **Also online at newbooks.asia/review/marriage-migration**

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**Cristina Lacomba**

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The aim of the book is to lead through that mysterious world, Fosted and born abroad,acho and leaved to the back in the graduate days and is the author of a number of publications exploring japanese folklore, including the celebrated Pencemon and Parables for a Modern World (University of California Press, 2009), for which he received the Chicago Folklife Prize. This book is a synthesis of the author’s long involvement with this genre and aims to provide a convenient overview of the field for the English-speaking newcomer.

The Book of Yōkai is a two-part distillation of scholarship that draws upon an extensive corpus of literature on the subject (two parts of 16 pages of references, as well as on interviews).
At the Catholic School I attended in Long Island in New York, Jesus was always milky-white. I can still see the full-size version of him hanging on the cross, a streak of bright red blood where the nails pierced that whiteness. I think I also believed he spoke English. Church history seemed to revolve mostly around Europeans, whether decreeing, conquering, or heroically witnessing to their faith. The Church was Europe (and increasingly, America, which I did not always seem to realize this). Subconsciously, I probably thought Jesus was an English-speaking Milanese or Venetian based on art museum exhibits. When I was in a Catholic Church in San Francisco years later I did a double take at the statues of a noticeably Confucius-like Jesus. Thus, began a slow, but steady reappraisal and fascination with what can be called global Christianity, liberation theology, and intercultural theology – leading to my ongoing work today in interfaith theology.

Peter Admirand

Jeffery W. Foster, The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Asia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), particularly ‘wow’ passages, one of them by Amalados, who ends his essay: “Finally, harmony and nonviolence will find their support in the teachings of reality that is relational and non-dual, having its roots in the otherness of India, the Dao with its yin and yang of China, the ‘interbeing’ or mutual enlightenment of Buddhism, and the Trinity of Christianity (cf. John 17-21-23” (p. 116). Such a quote is representative of the fruit and limited potential of Christianity immediate influence, especially in the case of a deep interreligious learning and partnership without sacrificing core principles and identity. There is confluence and overlap but also diversity.

Peter Phan hits a similarly high and deeply laudable passage: “Moreover, because of its intrinsically plural character, Christian spirituality is fundamentally open and receptive to other spiritualities, learning from their different emphasis on the divine (e.g., in Hinduism), or on the human (e.g., in Confucianism and Buddhism), or on the cosmos (e.g., in Taoism) (p. 512). Other essays include Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid’s careful analysis of the historical and contemporary plight of Christians in Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon, while David Mark Neuhaus helpsfully examines the history, developments, setbacks, and key themes of Jewish-Christian dialogue in West Asia. Such a context, as he reminds scholars, remains a challenging one in Europe and the United States – or in the Arab-Muslim world. He challenges scholars to broaden their conception of Jewish-Christian dialogue, for example, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism) to begin to form a more nuanced and holistic picture while providing opportunities and material for deeper, more focused study or research.

In this regard, the handbook continues my ongoing learning and awareness of interreligious dialogue, in this case the rich tapestry of Christianity and Islam, a tradition neglected in many contexts. For example, while I might have a quote is representative of the fruit and limitless potential of Christianity, learning from their different emphasis on the divine (e.g., in Hinduism), or on the human (e.g., in Confucianism and Buddhism), or on the cosmos (e.g., in Taoism) (p. 512). Other essays include Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid’s careful analysis of the historical and contemporary plight of Christians in Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon, while David Mark Neuhaus helpsfully examines the history, developments, setbacks, and key themes of Jewish-Christian dialogue in West Asia. Such a context, as he reminds scholars, remains a challenging one in Europe and the United States – or in the Arab-Muslim world. He challenges scholars to broaden their conception of Jewish-Christian dialogue, for example, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism) to begin to form a more nuanced and holistic picture while providing opportunities and material for deeper, more focused study or research.

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John Garver's *China's Quest* is a major addition to the literature covering the People's Republic of China's (PRC's) diplomatic history. Until now there has been no comprehensive single volume text on the topic in English, and Garver is exceptionally qualified for this project, having published books on China's relations with the United States, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Iran, Taiwan, the Middle East, and India. In this book the focus is on China's relations with the five major Asian powers: the USSR/Russian Federation, Japan, India, Iran, and the United States. His conceptual theme is the connection between domestic and international pressures that drive the PRC's foreign relations. This is one of the most important features of this book; too often analysis of international relations ignores what is happening inside a state, focusing instead on geopolitical concerns. Garver's approach gives equal weight to both, and his history is the stronger for it.

Jonathan Fulton

**A historical atlas of Tibet**

Karl Ryavec's book is a remarkable addition to the study of Tibet; more a cartographic history in fact than a historical atlas. For what Ryavec manages to do, far more than simply to present historical information in a series of maps, is to offer a new kind of history of the Tibetan plateau, a new way of understanding the landscape and the people who inhabit it.

Simon Wickham-Smith

Ryavec's specific aim with his atlas is to “map the historical growth and spread of Tibetan civilization across the Tibetan Plateau and bordering hill regions, from prehistoric times to the annexation of the Tibetan state by China in the 1950s” (p. 5). This is a very tall order, and elsewhere in the book he indicates that, having spent 20 years on this project he would like another 20 years to go deeper and to produce more maps to show different aspects of Tibetan history. Nonetheless, the enthusiasm with which other Tibetologists have reacted to the idea that the maps are accurate was probably exaggerated as the maps have not been peer reviewed in the way that scholarly journals are expected to be.

Ryavec's achievement is to present a basic factual narrative of Tibetan history in words, while at the same time plotting the implications of this history within an implied three-dimensional geographical and topographic space. In this way, the reader grasps the important developments of Tibetan political and religious history in terms of physical distance as much as of geographic and topographic space. In this way, the reader grasps the important developments of Tibetan political and religious history in terms of physical distance as much as of geographic and topographic space. In this way, the reader grasps the important developments of Tibetan political and religious history in terms of physical distance as much as of geographic and topographic space.

For instance, if we look simply at the expansion of Tsara (insets of maps 13, 16, 29, and 35), we can see very clearly the dramatic changes that occurred during the Ganden Phodrang period (1642–1951), initiated by the ‘Great’ Fifth Dalai Lama Lobsang Gyatso (1617–82). Reading these maps as visual intelligence, showing the adaptations to, and relationships between, the political and the religious, we can also observe the shifting sands of affiliation. The Gelukpa control over Tibet, manifested architecturally in the construction of the Potala on the Marpo Ri (in the northeastern quarter of Lhasa) during the second half of the 17th century, also manifested in the building and appropriation of monasteries by the Gelukpa. Thus, even within the environs of Lhasa, we can see for instance that the Rato monastery (seat of the Rato reincarnations) not only switched allegiance from Kadampa to Gelukpa during the Panchenpa period (1354–1642 period), but is also here listed as a ‘new construction’. During the Ganden Phodrang period it is shown as an established monastery. As we see a microhistory of this one monastery, but in the narrative context, we begin to ask questions about the process of such switches of allegiance, about how the Geluk monastery of Rato itself grew in parallel with the importance of the Rato lamas in the local and religious politics. These questions, of course, are not ones that an atlas will answer, but they come more readily to mind perhaps – or at least come to mind in more explicit shapes – from within a scalar, graphic form, than from within a linear, verbal form.

Answers to such questions can be discovered and interrogated from other sources, and I think that Ryavec's project could have done more to point the reader to scholarship from which more detailed histories might be gleaned. Such scholarship might be familiar to some readers, but the lack of such a bibliography emphasizes how sometimes the target audience for the book is not really made clear. Tibetologists will read the data, I suspect, in very different ways from those who are unfamiliar with Tibetan political and religious history. The texts that accompany the maps provide a clear and elegant historical overview, but they may not present the depth of material required by someone familiar with Tibet. That said, the book’s primary focus is of course not to give a written history, but a story through maps, and in this regard it is a most valuable contribution.

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The tipping point for artistic alternatives in East Asia

“Would this be the time for a permanent social change?” and “Could alternative artistic and creative practices facilitate the transformation?”, are two questions posed by the spray painted image of a masked protestor pitching a translated copy of Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point* in Yaumatei, Hong Kong.¹ Created by a local graffiti artist during the ‘Fishball Revolution’ in February 2016, this larger-than-life stencil adapts and builds upon the original visual message made by British street artist Banksy in Bethlehem in 2005.² In Banksy’s work, commonly known as the *Flower Thrower*, a protestor is armed with a bouquet of colorful flowers to promote peace, instead of grenades, rocks or Molotov cocktails to be thrown at adversaries.³ However, in Hong Kong’s version, the *Book Thrower*, the protestor is equipped with the knowledge that a sudden but profound transformation of paradigms, policies and practices is possible when, as Gladwell suggests, “the moment of critical mass”, is reached.

Echoing the queries put forward by the stenciled protestor, this special issue examines the artistic and creative practices emerging in East Asia and how they are gaining prominent status, not only in the art scene, but in society as a whole. Rather than mirroring social transformations, these groundbreaking practices initiate thought-provoking alternatives for both art and life. They have become instrumental for bringing forward new subjectivities and reshaping the intrinsic values of social and cultural well-being.
“Art needs to be more than a cosmetic intervention, if it is to be a catalyst for cities conducive to well-being.”

As with the majority of alternative artistic and creative practices, the significance of Book thrower is interdependent with the temporal, spatial and socio-political dimensions of the connected local context. Since the emergence of previously local street artists, the City of Hong Kong has witnessed the gradual evolution of its traditional public spaces. The growing popularity of alternative artistic and creative practices is in fact specifically adapted and modified in response to the demands of the local contexts, as well as the need for social transformation and community building. Based on my own comparative research across the disciplinary boundaries can bring forward new horizons and a better understanding of the significance of social transformations emerging in East Asia today.

Minna Valjakka, Research Fellow, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

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2. This local graffiti artist prefers to remain anonymous.
Art and aesthetic environmental awakening at Plum Tree Creek

Socially engaged art practices, such as those found at the Plum Tree Creek project in Taiwan, allow artists, architects and the local community to collaborate in order to revise everyday-life customs and representations that are attentive to the environment, whether natural, human, or built. The Plum Tree Creek project regenerating environmental aesthetics that both embodied and reflected the specificity of local culture, history and geography, at a time when the community came under threat of systematic urbanization. The Plum Tree Creek project offers an example of ‘new genre land art’, comparable to Joseph Beuys’ idea of ‘Social Sculpture’; this participatory project has indeed had a sustainable social impact by awakening the local community through environmental aesthetics.

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6. The theory of ‘Social Sculpture’ was developed by artist Joseph Beuys in the 1960s. It saw everything as art and argued that every aspect of life could be approached creatively. As a result everyone had the potential to be an artist. Mesch, C. & V. Mickely (eds.) 2007. Joseph Beuys: The Reader, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Art as environment
The project Art as Environment: A Cultural Action at Plum Tree Creek was initiated in 2010 by artists and architects based in the area of Zhuwei in New Taipei City. The project was curated by Wu Mali, an artist and practising architect, whose work most often reflects socio-cultural issues, such as environmental protection, paternalism, and communities whose histories have been forgotten by mainstream narratives, for example, women factory workers and housewives. Wu Mali was inspired by American artist Susan Lacy’s ideas of ‘new genre public art’, and community cultural interventions of the 1990s. Ideas of participatory art practices that incorporate conversations – what art theorist Grant Kester calls: ‘conversation pieces’ – also became paramount in her work.1

Wu’s idea to curate a community-based project that addresses environmental issues emerged in relation to a local problem. The environmental issue at stake was a polluted river, providing the title to her curator’s statement: Mending the Broken Land with Water: A Cultural Intervention at the Plum Tree Creek.2 What struck Wu was the degree to which the condition of a river could reflect the urban regeneration and local quality of life. Such was the case with the Plum Tree Creek, a tributary of the Tamsui River. The thought was this: if people accept a polluted river, if they forget how the creek used to be, and if they have no awareness of the natural environment in which they live, then no vision for a better future quality of life is possible.

In fact, starting in 1994, several environmental art exhibitions went on display along the bank of the Tamsui River, becoming the first ‘off-side’ art to address environmental issues in Taiwan.3 These exhibitions, however, were designed for the public to see and reflect upon; there were no participatory elements in the making of these works. In addition, many government-funded art exhibitions or events were not programmed to run indefinitely. Local community members and other spectators were not invited to participate in the works; they were not given the chance to actively take part in shaping art projects or places. And although audiences were seeing objects displayed outside, they largely remained unaware of the connections between artwork, land and human landscape.4

New genre land art
Similar to Lacy’s idea of ‘new genre public art’, the Plum Tree Creek project is presented as a form of ‘new genre land art’ in order “to be regarded as a practice of artistic ecological reha-

Appendix
The project offers a series of events to open up questions and invite people to contemplate the ways in which their lives relate to the river. There are five subprojects: Breakfast at Plum Tree Creek, Community Theater; Local Green Life, The Creek in Front of My School and The Nomadic Museum. The project also includes an educational forum through artist-in-residence schemes and workshops whereby school pupils, university students and local residents can interact and discuss with each other. The artist in residence scheme, a component of the Creek in Front of My School that is hosted by the Bamboo Curtain Studios and local schools, has provided a platform offering a significant participatory potentiality for educators, young people of different age groups, parents and students alike.

The subproject Breakfast at Plum Tree Creek, led by Wu Mali, is another telling example of participatory work, consisting of regular breakfast meetings and gatherings during which participants are invited to cook and eat seasonal foods from local farmers. Sharing a common interest for food allows people to sit and discuss, with local farmers included. The process helps to make participants more aware of their local environment.

The other subproject, Shaping of a Village: The Nomadic Museum Project, led by Professor Jin-Mao Huang and his students from the Department of Architecture at Tamkang University, focuses on community lifestyles and tries to revive the practice of ‘handcrafts’ amongst residents who, for the most part, moved from urban areas to settle in this cheaper area. The idea of a Nomadic Market has also been used to foster interactions between craft people, residents, visitors, as well as with the local and natural environments.

Sustainable awakening and the community’s cultural action
The Plum Tree Creek project has run since 2010 and was awarded the Taishin Contemporary Art award in 2013. The project has fostered discussions and attracted attention from the art scene in Taiwan; it has shown the extent to which art can transform a community for the better and awaken people to environmental issues, such as water pollution, in a sustainable fashion. It has highlighted the importance of eco-wellbeing and its relevance to metropolises such as Taipei as a possible response to environmental problems. The Plum Tree Creek project’s ‘new genre land art’ has a sustainable social impact through interaction. The project is by nature relational, dialogical, participatory, and, to some extent, comparable to Joseph Beuys’ “social sculpture” with its environmentally drawn awakening dimension, which invites willing participants and all people concerned to creatively reshape our environment accordingly for a sustainable, better future life. This participatory project has proved to be more efficient in addressing those issues in a sustainable way than government funded projects such as the ‘Taipei Public Art Festival’ in the years 2000s, or even the 1990s ‘Environmental Art Festival’. The impacts of globalization and urbanization are obvious in the area of New Taipei City. It is a place where developing that every aspect of life could be approached creatively. As a result everyone had the potential to be an artist. Mesch, C. & V. Mickely (eds.) 2007. Joseph Beuys: The Reader, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

The Nomadic Museum. Images courtesy of the Bamboo Curtain Studio.

Above: The curator Wu Mali explaining the ideas behind the project, left inset: Map of the project Art as Environment: A Cultural Action at Plum Tree Creek.
Waste has made a presence in contemporary Chinese art since the beginning of the 21st century, either incorporated into installation artworks, as the content of photographs or paintings, or featured in documentary films. This artistic trend simultaneously reflects and warns of the rapid accumulation of waste brought about by China’s embrace of global consumerism and urban-focused development. Analyzing different approaches adopted by a number of artists who deal with waste, this article explores the criticality embodied in their works that help raise awareness of the increasingly severe social and environmental consequences.

Meijun WANG

Phoenixes rising from the waste
Xu Bing (b. 1955), a leading contemporary Chinese artist, completed a large installation piece entitled Phoenix Project in 2002. It consists of two gargantuan sculptures of the legendary phoenix, one 100 feet long and the other 90 feet long (see image on issue cover). The romantic connotations of this creature, however, are buried under the hard reality that contributed to their creation, since the two mythical birds are made entirely of building waste and tools that Xu collected from construction sites, which are ubiquitous in contemporary China with the endless process of urban development. These recycled materials include shovels, hard hats, bamboo scaffolding, steel rebar and scrap iron, extinguishers, jackhammers, pipes, tire rims, saws, screwdrivers, pliers, plastic accordion tubing, among other countless items that were painstakingly arranged to form the body, feathers, and talons of the creatures. The industrial construction gives the birds a solid and punitive stance as they rise into the air. Yet as night falls, their mythical appearance, and the romantic connotations of this creature, are reawakened among other countless items that were painstakingly arranged to form the body, feathers, and talons of the creatures. The industrial construction gives the birds a solid and punitive stance as they rise into the air. Yet as night falls, their mythical appearance, and the romantic connotations of this creature, are reawakened.

This work directly engages with the mainstream social discourse in contemporary China, the consumption-oriented urban development. Xu began this work in early 2008 when he was invited to create a piece of public art for the atrium of the World Financial Center in Beijing, which was then under construction. Upon visiting the site he was shocked by the primitive working conditions in which migrant workers labored; they posed a striking contrast with the ultra-modern under construction. Upon visiting the site he was shocked by the primitive working conditions in which migrant workers labored; they posed a striking contrast with the ultra-modern.

Waste as an aesthetic object
Xie’an artist Xing Danwen (b. 1967) might have been one of the first contemporary Chinese artists to turn her attention to the increasing presence of waste in China. Her photographic series disCONNECTION (fig. 1), completed in 2002-2003, takes as its subject matter industrial electronic waste, known as ‘E-trash’, that developed countries have dumped in China. Every year, thousands of tons of electronic trash are transported from America, Japan, Korea, and other developed countries, to southern coastal regions such as Guangdong and Fujian, where they are sorted and recycled. According to a recent United Nations report, China is currently the largest e-waste dumping site in the world.7 During her field research in Guangdong Province, one of the most developed regions in China, Xing discovered that thousands of local and migrant workers made a tough living by sorting out mounds of computer and electronic trash in primitive and unprotected working conditions. These waste pickers were exposed to various toxic substances as they tore apart discarded electronic appliances, and during the process they also seriously polluted water and soil in the surrounding areas and beyond, and indirectly contaminated local agricultural produce.8 Xing’s approach to this distressing reality, which had apparently been going on without much public attention in the shadow of spectacular economic success in this part of China, was aesthetic abstraction. Rather than exposing the abhorred working conditions, she photographed the products of strenuous and long hours of labor: mounds of circuit boards, plastic cords, silicon chips, and other electronic components. She gave each mound a close-up shot, capturing disparate shapes and colors of fragmented mechanical products. Her aestheticizing of the cold and lifeless scrap turned them into provocative and enticing images. Their semi-abstract and aesthetically intriguing appearance simultaneously draws audiences in and surprises them once they realise what has been photographed. In a twisted way, these images constitute a distinctive portrait of the downside of China’s rapid development that, in Xing’s words, “conveys the immensity of the problem as well as the unbearable details I witnessed in these e-wastelands.”9 Titled disCONNECTION, ironically relating to electronic products’ purpose of facilitating connection, the work reflects the socio-cultural disconnection between different social groups such as producers of electronic goods, consumers of them, and the trash pickers who also deal with them, in an increasingly atomized contemporary society. The aestheticization and abstraction of the otherwise formidable reality becomes Xing’s unique way of revealing a dark side of globalization and exposing an ugly truth behind China’s rapid development.

Jiangsu-born multimedia artist Han Bing (b. 1974) also used waste as his object of aesthetic contemplation when he made rubbish-ridden rivers, a byproduct of China’s consumerist urbanization, the topic of his art.10 He was drawn to the alarmingly visible contamination of above-ground water throughout China as a result of the mindless and irresponsible disposal of everyday trash, and began his multiple-year photographic series Urban Amber in 2005. The photo Urban Amber Red Flies Flying on Skyline Cranes (2006), taken in Beijing, presents a bluish green body of water where one sees water lines and fallen leaf-like objects floating above a forest of construction cranes with red flags flying overhead, a prevailing sight in China’s accelerated urban expansion. At first glance, the image looks exquisite, giving the illusion of an attractive water surface covered by foliage and animated by swimming fish beneath. Looking closely, however, one realises that it is waste such as garbage bags, plastic bottles, and human sewage that make up the water’s surface. The bluish-green color itself is the result of the water being heavily polluted by putrid rubbish and masses of algae. In other pieces from the series (fig. 2) we see reflections of various man-made structures, such as glamorous skyscrapers and new residential complexes for the rich, shanty dwellings for the urban poor, migrants and peasants, and commercial establishments and advertising billboards, all indistinguishably shrouded under a body of water infected with filthy rubbish.

In this conceptual work, Han took photos of many heavily polluted bodies of water in Beijing and produced single-exposure images without any modifications other than simply turning them upside down. However, it is with such a witty and perceptive reversal that the rubbish thoughtlessly thrown...
Byproducts of China’s urban development and consumerism

Wang’s film shows how, in order to meet the insatiable demand for construction materials as thousands of new buildings are added to the city’s urban landscape, workers dig deep into mountains and rivers to excavate stones and sand. The numerous pits left behind are used as ready-made landfills into which tons of urban waste are poured. Many of these operations are illegal, but continue nevertheless. On the flip side of this rapid urbanization and rising consumerism, is the bleak and liminal existence of thousands of scavengers, who try to thrive at the lowest level of Chinese society by sorting and recycling waste. Wang’s film takes us into the everyday lives and mentality of these people who live in shabby shanties built from recycled materials, and whose clothes and sometimes food are sourced from the dumps themselves. There, children find toys that their parents were unable to afford.

Overall, Wang’s photographs and his documentary expose this dark reality existing side-by-side with a world-class city populated by glistening skyscrapers and embellished with socio-architectural projects from internationally famous architects. As his research reveals, the continuous urban expansion, the growing materialism and consumerism, and the negligence from both the municipal government and urban residents seem to have pushed China’s capital city to the edge of self-sufficiency with the hundreds of landfills forming a thick belting encircling the city proper.

Civic politics

The increasing presence of waste in art speaks to the omnipresence of waste in contemporary urban society. Accompanying apparent prosperities, brought about by China’s spectacular economic development and nationwide urbanization in the past two decades, is the astonishing accumulation of garbage. Artists such as those discussed above are keenly aware of this problem and in their art they examine waste in its various forms and conditions; they have developed new concepts, methodologies, and aesthetics surrounding waste. Their creative interpretations and realistic representations of waste endow this lowly material a unique role of criticality and make visible its invasive presence, exposing waste as a phenomenon largely ignored in the state-controlled mainstream media and cultural production until recently. As such, their efforts contribute to the growth of ‘green public sphere’, a term coined by environmental scholars in their discussions about China’s rising environmental activism.16,17

Moreover, the works produced by these individual artists could be seen as ‘parallel structures’, a concept advanced by Yuval Noah Harari in his call for individuals to engage in small-scale work and politics from below to challenge the totalitarian dictatorship and create a better society.18 Resonating Havel’s political ideas is Chinese art critic Wang Nanning’s adoption of ‘civic politics’ as a useful concept for discussing the work of contemporary Chinese artists who engage with social problems and accentuate the power of artworks to stimulate civic action and create new realities.19 Wang argues that ‘civic politics’ is different from the grand and centralized top-down politics, and defines it as a bottom-up, through-and-through practice.20 He thus recognizes the importance of various individual-based and different approaches adopted by artists who assume a critical attitude towards China’s urban reality.

In a post-totalitarian but still authoritative regime of China, the operation of waste disposal, the appalling destruction of the environment including rivers, soil, and air, the horrific lives lived by scavengers and the trash pickers, and government negligence or implicit collaboration...
Over the last decade in South Korea, contemporary art has been undergoing an important transformation toward more participatory, collaborative and collective practices. By taking the case of the *Dongdaemun Rooftop Paradise*, a community engaged art project that has occupied the rooftop of an old run-down building in Seoul, this essay explores how artists seek to intervene in the branding that relies on spectacles, how they unsettle the hegemonic script of ‘creative city’ and what kind of space is imagined to become a ‘paradise’ within the unjust city.

**Building the ‘Dongdaemun Rooftop Paradise’ on the margins of Seoul**

By Hong KAL

**CONTEMPORARY ART** In South Korea (hereafter Korea) has been undergoing an important transformation toward more participatory, collaborative and collective practices. Korean art critics have identified the 2000s as an era of community art.¹ The recent proliferation of community art has roots in Modern Art, the political art of the 1980s.² Yet, contemporary community art projects are profoundly different from their predecessor in their use of relatively diverse forms and the ideas of community that are not necessarily subversive, class-conscious, or oriented toward radical activism. They are more closely aligned with the global currency of participatory, socially engaged, and community-based art practices.

As Grant Kester, a prominent art historian who advocates dialogical art, observed, the first decade of the 21st century witnessed intellectual and creative tendencies of art practices that involve collaborative, dialogical, and collective modes of production.³ In Korea and elsewhere, community art works are criticized for different reasons, such as for losing the aesthetic specificity, lacking the political criticality, being appropriated by urban regeneration strategies, or becoming complicit with neoliberal agendas. In the art world in Korea, for example, they are often dismissed as “benevolent NGO art.”⁴ However, rather than negating them, it would be more productive to analyze complex and contradictory aspects of community art practices. Responding to the suspicion of these art practices as unprofessionalized, politically correct, or even religious,⁵ Grant Kester has elaborated that collaborative, collective and dialogical art works are challenging residual modernist notions of aesthetic autonomy, the authorship, and the artist’s relation to audience.⁶

This essay explores aesthetically and politically challenging aspects of community art in Korea. It is concerned less with what artists can do in a narrow instrumental sense and more with how they might open up a space from which to reimagine the possibilities to intervene in the city. The case study here is the *Dongdaemun Rooftop Paradise* (hereafter the DRP), a site-specific community engaged art project on the rooftop of an old run-down building in Dongdaemun, a district that is crowded with old markets and new shopping towers and which has been designated as a special tourist zone in Seoul. The DRP is a critical response to the Dongdaemun Design Plaza and Park (hereafter the DDP), an expressive new spectacle opened in March 2014 located about 200 meters from the rooftop. The DDP involves the redevelopment of an old space again on the grain of speculative urban redevelopment that revolves to spectacle and gentrification. It puts emphasis on the reconfiguration of art, artists, and community, and the re-imagination of labor that is not bounded by capitalist concepts of efficiency, speed, profit, and consumption. By taking the case of the DDP, I question how community art projects seek to intervene in the urban branding that relies on spectacles, how they unsettle and complicate the official script of ‘creative city’ and what kind of space is imagined to become a ‘paradise’ within the unjust city. From its conception, however, it faced numerous criticisms including the destruction of historical sites, the eviction of street vendors,⁷ and the selection of a foreign art architect who did not even visit the site for design. The absence of reference to local contexts makes the functioning of the DDP as a public space highly questionable.⁸

**Dongdaemun Rooftop Paradise (DRP)**

While the DDP is criticized for being decontextualized from and destructive of the historically charged local site, a group of eight artists and cultural actors led by senior artist Chan-kook Park conducted an ‘action research’ in the Dongdaemun area in winter 2013. Two months later in February 2014, they founded an abandoned rooftop of an old ‘paradise’ and unwanted urban junk is often used for artistic creations, particularly in the DRP. As an expression of hope and desire, the DDP was celebrated with a promise that it would bring in cultural consumption, urban tourism, investment, and capital accumulation, namely the ‘DP effects.’⁹ From its conception, however, it faced serious criticisms including the destruction of historical sites, the eviction of street vendors, and the selection of a foreign art architect who did not even visit the site for design. The absence of reference to local contexts makes the functioning of the DDP as a public space highly questionable.⁹

Over the last decade in South Korea, contemporary art has been undergoing an important transformation toward more participatory, collaborative and collective practices. By taking the case of the *Dongdaemun Rooftop Paradise*, a community engaged art project that has occupied the rooftop of an old run-down building in Seoul, this essay explores how artists seek to intervene in the branding that relies on spectacles, how they unsettle the hegemonic script of ‘creative city’ and what kind of space is imagined to become a ‘paradise’ within the unjust city.

**Hong KAL**
through the renewal of the byproducts of capitalism, the DRP calls into question how to reconfigure the ecology of the market area that once enabled its success, but does not guarantee its future anymore. The market has a self-sufficient mechanism in which the processes of planning, design, manufacturing, distribution, and sales are clustered within a radius of one kilometer. Here, about 4000 new items are put on the market daily and sometimes new items, mostly knockoffs, are produced as fast as in three days. This speedy on-the-spot mechanism once made the market successful as a fashion hub. However, the elements of an outdated structure, dependent upon closed and vertical relations, the remaining labor intensive industry in poor working conditions, the unethical competition, and the rising rent, keep away new business, making the future of the market uncertain. Also, the market now has to compete with those in Guangzhou and Hanoi where garment industries are growing rapidly. For its survival, the DRP members believe, the market should renew itself with new values other than developmentalist ideas of economic efficiency, speed, and productivity that once enabled the market’s success. But the DRP members are also aware of the danger of being coopted by the arts and culture-led redevelopment strategies that are oriented toward tourism, entertainment, and consumption. Their concern is thus how to revive the place and reconfigure the relations without being displaced and appropriated by the ‘creative’ industries. The DRP arranged various activities including remaking the attic, beekeeping, gardening, and hosting workshops and events, under the idea of cab-rary that combines knowledge, skills, and art in the interactive exchanges of research, production, and distribution. In Real Clothes, the workshops organized in the fall of 2014, invited sewing experts, designers, merchants, and business owners who are in the same field, but who had rarely met in person before. They discussed problems of how to improve poor working conditions, to reduce the amount of inventory, and to make ‘real clothes’ other than cheap copies. The meetings led to a collaborative work, in which sewing experts participated in a design process, for the first time in their more than 20 years working experience. The practice of collaborative relations was expanded to the idea of connecting rooftops. In November 2014, the DRP opened the DRP Sales Presentation, an event set up like a real estate sales presentation. It advertised an attic (about 300 square feet) as a renovated, multifunctional, live-work structure. It further showcased an attic model as a mobile unit designed to be movable to nearby rooftops. By mocking a sales presentation for speculative investment by real estate developers, the DRP performed possibilities of creatively intervening in the urban branding strategies geared toward the construction of spectacular spaces for consumption, such as the DDP. From a space of urban margins such as the rooftop, the DRP imagines a ‘paradise’. What is important for them is a process of being rather than what it ought to be.

The rooftop community

The rooftop has been visited by many people in the past three years; its atmosphere is open, casual, temporary and playful (fig. 3). Yet, the DRP is not intended to be an entertainment site for inner-city creatives, art parties, or hipster’s gatherings. While distancing themselves from cultural consumption, the DRP members are also cautious about a romanticized idea of community and an attempt to restore it. The idea of community is at the core of the debate on community art. Some art critics and historians are highly skeptical of any collective form of identification and often unfavorably view community art works as suppressing the unique identity of individual collaborators under the false coherence of a community and thus reinforcing social stereotypes and generalizations. However, as Grant Kester has aptly pointed out, the community formation is an ongoing process that shifts between moments of relative coherence and incoherence. Simply pointing to the danger of essentializing forms of identification, Kester has argued, is not a sufficient response to complex questions raised by collaborative and collective art practices. If it is indeed more important to observe specific and contingent strategies in them. On the rooftop, a space that is displaced, isolated, marginalized and sometimes romanticized in the unjust city, the DRP brings people together as a community that communicates ideas, senses, and imaginations, attending to differences within the group. It envisions the rooftop community through the reassertion of inhabitation, the revalorization of discarded objects, and the exploration of encounter; sociality, playfulness, and ambience in the everyday details.

On the rooftop, new relations have been unfolding for the past three years through the gradual accumulation of interactions between the DRP members, neighbors, merchants, and visitors. The relations are not always feel-good or harmonious, but sometimes even quite antagonistic when it comes to the rights to the space. The DRP’s lease of the rooftop attic was arranged with Kim Kang-sik, the building manager, but most details were agreed After. His sudden death in the winter of 2015, the new manager tried to void the lease agreement with the DRP, so that he could rent out the renovated rooftop for a higher rent. The eviction attempt failed due to the complexity of the ownership. The rooftop is officially a common area shared by the 240 owners of the shops, storage units and apartments in the building. Since the majority of them are absentee owners living in more affluent areas, like Gangnam or even abroad, it was very difficult for the new manager to achieve a collective resolution. The rights to the rooftop are further complicated due to the fact that the rooftop attic is not an authorized structure and thus any lease contract involves legal issues. Under such intricate conditions, in which the immediate eviction was avoided but is always pending, the DRP members have been exploring ways to officially claim the rights to the rooftop not only through legal terms but more importantly by inhabiting and using it as a communal space with other building tenants and merchants, such as simply eating and chatting together in the space. In the case of the DRP, what is more interesting than the question of whether artists are victims and/or facilitators of gentrification, is to see how they engage in the urban fabric and create a space from which to critique the hegemonic politics of spectacle that is evident in the nearby DDP.

In and out of the spectacle

The DRP is imbued with the spirit of radical avant-gardism that blurs the institutionalized boundaries of the aesthetics and the social. The merger of art and everyday life is advocated that blurs the institutionalized boundaries of the aesthetics and the social. The merger of art and everyday life is advocated. The DRP seeks to counter the politics of spectacle as showcased in the DDP, which lacks relations and connections with local sites and people. But, there are some intriguing questions regarding the contemporary working of spectacle. It has been observed that contemporary spectacle is not merely trying to make people passive spectators, but instead it inspires them to participate in playful interactivity and to be part of emotional experiences. Contemporary spectacle now seeks to establish the atmosphere for lived experiences, loaded with user-friendly modes and participations, co-opting the strategies that were previously used to resist spectacle. Then, how do we locate the DRP in such a context of the new working of spectacle today? While retaining some contradictions, I would like to reconsider the DRP’s activities that put forward new meanings of space, time, labor, play, and relations, away from those of efficiency, speed, productivity, consumption, profit, and speculation, and engage in questions working in and out of spectacle and disturbing its boundaries. There is no guarantee that their experiments with urban spaces and relations will be replicable in the city of the future. Then again, their intervention lies not in a measurable outcome, but in a process in which a space is opened up to untie the ‘creative city’. In the analysis of community art practices, what is more needed is building a critical framework to understand their potentials, limits and contractions. This is particularly crucial in the context that the mainstream art institutions and the disciplines of art have transformed into public art projects that involve communication and collaboration between artists and non-artists in rather dematerialized forms. It gives hope, however, to see more efforts trying to address in a substance manner the important transformation toward collective practices in contemporary art production in Korea and elsewhere.

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President Xi Jinping’s ‘China Dream’, promising prosperity and progress, is by and large mapped onto the city. In the case of Beijing, this dream can primarily be found within the fifth ring road, with its cultural heritage sites and fancy buildings designed by ‘starchitects’. But what about the people, most of whom migrant workers, living beyond this significant demarcation? Are they allowed to partake in the China Dream too?

How does art intervene?

Indeed, China’s global rise is epitomized by the changing central cityscape of Beijing. Xi Jinping’s China Dream finds its materialization in shiny skyscrapers, speedy ring roads, fancy buildings designed by starchitects, and green parks. This dream is quite firmly located within the fifth ring road. As we will show in this article, art intervenes, challenges and interrupts this dream.

The 2011 Song of the Fifth Ring Road by MC Hotdog, together with comedy actor Yue Yunpeng, has become an unofficial anthem for Beijing. This is not only because of the song’s funny lyrics and MTV video, but also because the ring roads really play a pivotal role in how people perceive and experience the city. Together with landmarks such as Tiananmen square, the CCTV Building and the Olympic Bird’s Nest, to name but a few, the ring roads are part of the mental map people have of Beijing: they help us locate where we are in this immense city.

In his work Beijing 2003, maverick artist Ai Weiwei spent 16 days driving along every street inside Beijing’s fourth ring, driving a total of 2450 kilometers. Most of the city’s key landmarks are located within and around the fourth ring road, but 51% of its residents live beyond the fifth ring road.1 There, we find urban villages, mostly occupied by migrant workers, alongside luxurious villa parks for expats and the new rich. The fifth ring road forms a class boundary, in the words of journalist Jiang,2 “the fifth and sixth ring roads have become the hopeless choice for new immigrants in the city because of the house prices of the core region.” It is thus no wonder that MC Hotdog selected this road for his song. What is located beyond it is generally rendered invisible and unknown, despite the number of people living there.

In probing into this link between art and social inequality, we are inspired by the invisibility of life beyond the fifth ring road. What are the implications of this invisibility? Following French philosopher Jacques Rancière, what is rendered visible and what is not, is part of the distribution of the sensible. This is the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it.3 It is the system that produces in- and exclusion that renders things visible or invisible, sayable or unsayable, audible or inaudible, through which the status quo in society is maintained. What is rendered sensible is often that which may challenge the status quo. Art, by its practices and forms of visibility, intervenes in the distribution and reconfiguration of the sensible in the social space; its aesthetics, “is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of expression”.4 Thus, aesthetics can help to contest naturalness and obviousness.

In his work Becoming a migrant worker, journalist and student Ma Lijiao participated in 5+1 in November 2014 for 10 days in the Xioajia Village, located in North-West Beijing. In his project, Ma Lijiao morphed into a student. Through these enactments, he succeeded, in our view, in rendering parts of life in the urban village sensible for the ‘petitioners’ village” in Beijing, as passive objects that were inhabited by migrant workers.

Ma Lijiao’s work interrogates especially the increased social inequality that accompanies China’s economic rise. Indeed, social inequality that accompanies China’s economic rise.

For example, the work of Yomi Braester, Robin Visser, Zhang Song of the Fifth Ring Road and environmental deterioration – have been repeatedly discussed in Chinese visual arts since the 1990s.6 Following French philosopher Jacques Rancière, what is rendered visible and what is not, is part of the distribution of the sensible. This is the “system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it.” It is the system that produces in- and exclusion that renders things visible or invisible, sayable or unsayable, audible or inaudible, through which the status quo in society is maintained. What is rendered sensible is often that which may challenge the status quo. Art, by its practices and forms of visibility, intervenes in the distribution and reconfiguration of the sensible in the social space; its aesthetics, “is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of expression”. Thus, aesthetics can help to contest naturalness and obviousness.

According to Maurizio Marini, the artworks by Zhang Dali, Dai Guanyao and Jin Feng enact such a redistribution of the senses amidst the urban revolution in China, following Rancière’s philosophy.7 In his words, “I contend that these artists contribute to an aesthetic revolution in the making, which can be defined as the redistribution of the visible, the audible, the sayable, and also the tactile and the olfactory. These artists are enacting a total revolution of the senses.” These three artists treat the urban objects – either the dilapidated walls in the hutongs of Beijing, or the petitioners from the ‘petitioners’ village’ in Beijing, as passive objects who silently tell their stories via the artists’ compositions and interpretations. As such, “they are making ordinary people assume the importance of the extraordinary.”

We will show how Ma Lijiao is doing something more: he does not render the people silent, nor does he attempt to transcribe their concerns in art. Instead, his artwork consists of an enactment of their concerns in which the artist becomes respectively a migrant worker, a journalist and a student. The title of the project, 5+1, could be gesturing towards a redistribution of the sensible and something more: 5 is the 5 ring roads that are part of the regime of the sensible; the +1 points to the intervention, which suggests that it wants to add something – new visions, new sounds, new smells, new words, from the artists and also the people living there who exercise their agency. How does the work of Ma Lijiao do that?

Becoming a migrant worker, journalist and student

Ma Lijiao participated in 5+1 in November 2014 for 10 days in the Xioajia Village, located in North-West Beijing. In his project, Ma Lijiao morphed into different roles; he acted as a migrant worker, a journalist and a student. Through these enactments, he succeeded, in our view, in rendering parts of life in the urban village sensible. Whereas in global discourse, migrant workers are often represented as a hodgepodge of faceless and faceless rural workers working in urban areas, Ma Lijiao tries to give them a face, a life and aspirations, by participating in their social media groups. In Ma’s words in an interview with us, “social media platforms can gather people from different locations of the real society to internet and make their voices heard together. There are anonymous social apps like Youmi which allows users to hide themselves behind their words. I think this (way of expression) is more real.”8 For example, he joined Wechat groups of the village such as the ‘Xioajia Community Youth Group’ on which Chen Yan, a young lady, said: “I’ve enrolled in a vocational school… I have some regrets.” Two other members of this WeChat group encouraged her to re-take the college entrance examination the next year in order to get into a college. It turned out that Chen Yan was not a fresh graduate from high school – she had worked for a year already. The screenshot of this conversation was part of the exhibition. It shows the mundane nature of their conversations on social media, it brings to light the aspirations of the migrant workers, their hopes of moving upwards in the social hierarchy by attaining a higher education, and their mutual encourage-ment within an online community – it creates a convivial online space. For the 5+1 Project exhibition in summer 2015, Ma printed out all the screenshots of chats for the audience to read. In this part of the work, the artist, acting as a migrant worker, saw things and heard voices that would otherwise not be visible or audible to him. Migrant workers emerge as individuals with feelings, and as people with critical voices and ambitions.

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In the village Ma discovered a walled compound with unfinished villas, called “Yuanmingyuan Villa” (“Yuanmingyuan beizhou”). These modern ruins are left-overs from the real estate bubble that still haunts China, and have now become the home and work place of some migrant workers. These unfinished buildings are symbolic of the fictitious of China’s alleged urbanization progress. The unfinished buildings and real estate projects in China are mainly due to economic and financial problems, or the overheated real estate industry, which result in the creation of zombie buildings and zombie cities. These unfinished villas were developed and built by the son of the former Beijing mayor Chen Xitong who was later jailed on charges of corruption. As Ma explained, “later, thanks to the 16-year sentence of Chen Xitong, and the lack of proper certification of development and construction, this project was suspended.”

The land became ungoverned, and contractors now rented out the spaces to the migrant workers. In images of the area Ma confronts us with the flip side of China’s urbanization. Take for example a renaissance style marble statue of a nude female stood incongruously next to a ‘villa’ basement that was inhabited by migrant workers (fig. 1). The statue connotes conspicuous luxury with a gloss of Europeanness, which has now faded into a ghost; her private parts covered with yellow paint. The statue serves as a marble reference to a dream vanished, overlooking the marginalized lives of migrant workers living next to it. In another image that is part of the work, Ma shows the protruding steel bars of an unfinished villa (fig. 2). The steel bars have been bent by the wind after many years. On the background we see a finished and inhabited district, that is the Beijing that the authorities would like us to see and experience. But in juxtaposing that residential area with the unfinished villas, Ma confronts us with the contradictions, tensions and class inequalities that underpin the real estate boom of Beijing and China. As such, his work resonates with the cinematic oeuvre of Jia Zhangke, in which the lives and struggles of migrant workers are presented as to confront the audience with the flip side of China’s alleged economic boom.

After his initial visit in November 2014, Ma returned to the village in the early summer of 2015, this time as ‘a journalist’ who filmed interviews with the residents. He encountered land renters who complained about a planned demolition, which was scheduled to happen soon. This demolition would tear down the illegal houses on the site, and the occupants, lacking any proper legal land use documentation, would not be compensated for their loss. In the film, a female land renter says to him: “We are not going to leave. Staying means we are going to revolt [paohui]”. They showed Ma the demolition notice. They wanted him to cover the forced demolition in the hope that some compensation might result from pressure to seek help from the government. The government is on the contractors’ side. They all know each other.” According to, “when we built these two three years ago, we didn’t know that the government planned to demolish here. […] We are all victims.” When asked what they were going to do when the contractors came to tear down their houses, the woman said: “We are not going to leave. Staying means we are going to revolt. [paohui].”

In its specific site, it is a case of what Minna Valjakka calls “site-responsive artwork”. The work unfolds itself in a complex intersection between the site, its social relations and the representations of both.

Fig. 2 (below): Protruding steel bars of the unfinished villa. Images courtesy of Ma Lijiao.

But are the villagers really more than just props? While the redemption of the villas may stimulate critical questions about urban progress in China, there are also questions left unanswered. The work is primarily exhibited in art spaces, which are usually sanitized spaces in Beijing, quite removed from the everyday lives of most people. What impact can such a work have? Also, by acting in different roles, and not revealing himself to be an artist, ethical questions are raised: who is using whom in this work? And what do the migrant workers gain in the end? Does not the artist benefit the most from their words?

While the work challenges an uncritical celebration of urban progress in China, a position that is shared with many artworks in China, these ethical questions about the involvement of migrant workers, and other communities in works of participatory art, remain unanswered. Let us take a step further. The fifth ring road, drive outside, take a detour, walk around, and experience a Beijing that may shatter the China Dream, but that may also allow for other dreams, other futures”.

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References

6. See note 3.
7. See note 1, p.140.
14. Ibid.
15. In order to avoid attracting attention from patrolling guards in this “villa” site, Ma could only take photos with his smartphone, and thus the photos are of a relatively low resolution. We encountered the same problem when we tried to document them. Nevertheless, the pursuit of an end product with high quality is rather rare in socially engaged art, since these practices are more process-based and they do not aim at producing the refined artworks that one sees in commercial galleries.
Media literacy and digital storytelling in contemporary Japan

Shin Mizukoshi

For several decades, media literacy has been understood as the critical reading of mass media and its educational possibilities. However, the rapid diffusion of digital technologies has changed the media landscape and it is almost time for us to fundamentally re-examine the terms ‘media’ and ‘literacy’. In this essay, I first provide a short overview of the current situation of media literacy in Japan. Second, I examine digital storytelling (DST) practices and discuss DST as one new method for achieving media literacy in Japan.

Challenges of media literacy in Japan

Japan is one of the most media-saturated countries in the world. Although a consistent national curriculum in media literacy, such as that offered in the U.K. or Canada, has not yet been introduced, compulsory and higher education involve systematic programs on media and information. In my personal experience, most of today’s Japanese undergraduate students exhibit at least the textbook definition of media literacy.

Media literacy has been understood for several decades as the critical reading of mass media and its related educational possibilities. “Look carefully, think critically” was the catchphrase. In the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, I revised the definition of media literacy in several ways, because the emergence of digital media was revolutionizing the general public from being just readers and consumers into writers and creators. One revised definition presents media literacy as a synthesis of three communication activities: technological operation, critical reception, and active expression. These three elements should complement one another; media literacy cannot proceed properly if the balance between them is lost. This provides a more comprehensive understanding than the traditional definition, which focused only on critical reception of media texts, and it has become a standard in understanding media literacy today. However, the rapid spread of digital media such as smartphones and SNS (Social Networking Services; examples include sites such as Facebook and twitter), paired with the conservative Shinzo Abe administration, has changed the Japanese media landscape once again. It is almost time for yet another fundamental re-examination of the terms ‘media’ and ‘literacy’.

In reviewing the recent media landscape of Japan, three issues cannot be overlooked. First, the Shinzo Abe administration has openly suppressed freedom of speech and journalism in Japanese mass media. Over the past few years, the Abe administration has attacked mass media on various fronts, from introducing right-wing Abe supporters into the management board of public broadcaster NHK, to threatening to revoke the broadcasting licenses of those stations that produce news programs critical of the Abe administration.

These troubling occurrences have been, worryingly, accompanied by critical comments on SNS by the general public, who welcomes these changes. The Japanese general public has mixed feelings about mass media: people are attracted by the aesthetically pleasing possibilities of the media, yet appalled by their superficial activities. Many misgivings with regard to mass media journalism arose on SNS, for example, after false reports and misinformation about the 3.11 disaster and the subsequent Fukushima nuclear power plant meltdown. Those suspicions, as a result, became linked to the Abe administration’s suppression of mass media.

Nowadays, mass media journalism wavers between the suppression of authority and criticisms of the general public. The second, era in which mass media alone was responsible for producing national master narratives came to an end around the time that the Internet became widely prevalent in the 1990s. The optimistic dream of rich and diverse free speech born on the net began to spread. However, as smartphones and SNS become ever more commonplace in the 2010s, and within master narratives of mass media no longer available, extreme and violent narratives are erupting onto the scene to replace them. Typically, these narratives are loud, racist and nationalist outcries from civilians, as well as unusually fierce criticism of the uncritical behavior of politicians and entertainers by the general public.

Third, a so-called “invisible illiteracy” has emerged in Japan. In recent years, smartphone dependencies have grown, whereas the number of PCs in use has declined sharply. Although this may simply reflect a public preference for newer, more convenient media, there are some undeniable side effects. On a smartphone’s small screen, only one application can be selected at a time; as people grow accustomed to performing only simple operations, the probability is high that they will no longer be able to engage in the more complex mental work of utilizing multiple windows across a wide range of software. In such an environment, the ability to critically examine society appears to be declining.

The problem is that most of the people attacking journalism, espousing racism and nationalism on the Internet are media literate in active expression (and possibly technological operation), but clearly not in critical reception. Previously, I mentioned the mutual relationship and importance of a balance between the three elements of media literacy: technological operation, critical reception, and active expression. A lack of balance has occurred within the new media landscape.

Many media and communication studies have found that people are increasingly living in “island universes.” In the age of mass media, for example, newspapers and television programs managed to develop public communication spheres in which people could get a broad overview of the socially important agendas, and where they encountered different opinions. Within an island universe, people share the same opinions and styles; they receive selective information, commentary and input from their favorite blogs or SNS groups. They don’t look beyond their islands, towards other “cultures.” Even though people may be able to proficiently operate smartphones and SNS, and even though they can actively express their opinions, they are less and less able to critically receive information. Digital media users are increasingly incapable of critically examining social commentary. A new blueprint for media literacy is required; one which will suit a media landscape without mass media as its core.

Digital storytelling in Japan

The most popular path to reach media literacy is through school education. However, school education in Japan is generally highly institutionalized, and there is not much allowance for teachers to incorporate digital media into the classroom. In Japan, where schools are seen as pure learning communities, the administration is reluctant to introduce any kinds of popular media into the classrooms, even though music videos and popular films have proven to be quite good teaching materials for media literacy in Western countries.

Regardless of these constraints, we need a new type of media literacy that is applicable not only in school education, but also in the whole of people’s everyday lives, because today’s digital technologies have been changing the whole of the media landscape. It is not possible to provide a complete discussion here, but we will propose one possible direction we could take: digital storytelling activities.

Digital Storytelling (DST) is a grassroots movement and a workshop-based practice that allows people to create short video stories using digital-based files (images, video, audio, etc.). Topics primarily include personal histories or everyday matters of life, which are then published in book form or create in first-person style and narratives are recorded using the creator’s own voices. DST was initiated by artist Dana Ashtari in San Francisco, so, in the early 1990s, it was further developed by the Center for DST in California. It has since spread throughout the world as a form of civic neighborhood empowerment, and social and public history.

It has been integrated with diverse fields such as hyper-local journalism, mental health, preschool education, among others. The videos are shared at screenings during community gatherings, through local cable TV stations, and via the websites of local institutions. I have been engaged with practical media studies’ projects such as Media Exprimo and Storypice since the mid-2000s. Media Exprimo is an interdisciplinary-design research and information platform that supports people’s media expressions and digital storytelling. Storypice is a bilateral research project (Finland and Japan) with a transdisciplinary and international team specialized in media studies, information design, and community planning. The team has developed workshop programs and online platforms to encourage people’s storytelling, and put them into practice both in Finland and in Japan. My fellow research project members and I have been developing new types of digital storytelling to encourage media literacy in Japan. Since the mid-2000s, we have produced four DST programs that were formulated with the cultural context of Japan in mind, in which people face stringent peer pressure that discourages them from talking about themselves, and where as a result, DST is not yet common or widespread. The programs are community-linked media projects intended to encourage general people to (re)weave collaborative storytelling networks via mobile media, such as smartphones or tablets, within local communities.

The four DST programs are the Comikaruta, the A-I-U-E-O Gabun, the Media Conte, and the Telephonnoscope. The Comikaruta project is a communal card game; the A-I-U-E-O Gabun project involves acrostic poetry; the Media Conte project is an interactive digital storytelling program with from thirty to thirty photographs accompanied by people’s voices; and the Telephonnoscope project is a micro-video storytelling system using a black rotary telephone and an A-I-U-E-O Gabun.

To solicit the participation of different generations, the programs intentionally introduced forms of Japanese traditional cultural play, such as Kōgi (an acrostic game), haku (a form of Japanese poetry), and A-I-U-E-O ban (an acrostic word game); gabun is a new term coined by us, consisting of ‘gō’ image, and ‘ban’ text). To sustain their impact, the DST programs were not only carried out as workshops at university campuses, but have also been deployed in local schools, among neighborhood municipal bodies, at traditional festivals, local governments, and through cable television stations.
Collaboration, playfulness and sustainability
The four programs above share three features: collaboration, playfulness and sustainability. In each type of DST, rather than crafting a story alone, participants interact with a facilitator or weave a story as a part of a group. In Western DST practices, the mantra “everyone has a story to tell” is the basis for the primary activity: digitizing complete stories already created by participants. In Japan, however, there are few opportunities to study or practice speech communication in a compulsory education program, and people are not at all familiar with how to tell a story in a public space. Because of this, DST workshops in Japan have to start with a dialogue between facilitators and participants and cooperation among participants. This collaboration discovers people’s dormant ‘story seeds’ (such as memories during the Pacific War, before inputting his pictures and voice into a PC, Photograph by the author.]

below: A piece of Comikatitu with a short poem: “Mom-and-pop candy store by three generations. How happy we are!” from the website of the project which the project which people can freely access to create their own works. Comikatitu in Bunkyo Ward, Tokyo. 2012.Courtesy of Comikatitu project.

Above: A senior local resident was checking his story about the memories during the Pacific War, before inputting his pictures and voice into a PC, Photograph by the author.

DST relative easily implementation, even by non-experts. Although we do need to take part the first time a workshop is held, the workshops can be facilitated and continuously conducted by members of local cable television stations, educational institutions, NPOs, and so forth. For example, A-4-U-E Cobin and Comikatitu have been used for a number of years by a cable TV program in Bunkyo Ward, Tokyo, and have helped the media to gather the stories of local residents.

DST to obtain media literacy
Admittedly, our trials of DST are not perfect. First, there is a discussion concerning the quality of pictures, plots, and editorial works of DST produced by the general public. However, it is not clear whether these DST must meet the same quality standards as mass media produced content. The interactive DST workshops create stories out of the voiceless feelings and thoughts of people. Most topics involve people’s everyday lives, not political or artistic matters. However, when DST is generated in many places, archived in many communities, and networked with other DST projects online, versatile streams of alternative stories will be created, challenging the master narrative in Japan.

Toriumi has described the emergence of people’s media expressions in the digital age as ‘Digital Mingei’. In the field of media literacy, the idea of ‘Digital Mingei’ is ‘Digital Folk Art’. Mingei, minshugyotu yon, was a Japanese art movement of the early 20th century that tried to bridge professional artists and everyday people, and to reconsider the beauty in everyday life. However, since the 1960s, Mingei was profoundly connected with the European Arts and Crafts movement, and also with laborers’ circle movements after World War II. It has been almost forgotten in contemporary Japan and is considered to produce nothing but tourist souvenirs. Toriumi reconsidered the Mingei in the field of DST. Media Express and Storyplacing are also based on the idea that DST could be a people’s folk art in the information-saturated but digitally-divided society.

Collaborative DST practices must be an important element of media literacy in the new age. Based on the evidence from our long term research projects, I propose that the community based DST workshops are the ideal sphere for media literacy, introducing new information technologies and accepting parts of traditional media literacy knowledge. Currently, DST makes the following two unique contributions to new media literacy.

First, the DST production process is a comprehensive media literacy experience. As mentioned previously, I coined a definition of media literacy involving the three communication activities of technological operation, critical reception and active expression. These three were suitable components in a mass media-driven society. However, to theorize new media literacy in the digital age, re-examination is essential. In the DST workshops, both participants and facilitators are involved in a variety of communications and therefore acquire comprehensive media literacy by following the example of others. In theoretical terms, the adjectives ‘technological’, ‘critical’ and ‘active’, and the nouns ‘operation’, ‘reception’ and ‘expression’ can freely interact during the workshops. For example, not only critical reception but critical operation and critical expression take place among participants and facilitators. These synthetic experiences seem more effective than traditional and individual educational programs on media literacy.

Second, DST produces certain mediated communities (media konotop) through the cyclical process of creation and reception. Mediated communities are not a priori entities, they are communities that are produced through communication activities such as using, watching, enjoying, consuming, exchanging, and chatting via media. In the future media landscape of Japan, we should intentionally design and build up relatively small-scale communities that are generated by community media. In the field of media and communication studies, it has been frequently mentioned that media creates and maintains communities and societies where people can communicate mutually and live together. DST is one of the concrete media practices for mediated communities. As James Carey and Benedict Anderson discuss, journalism of mass media and school text books have created ‘nation states’. A series of DST practices make relatively small communities closely connected with geographic and cultural communities. For example, we have facilitated DST workshops in many venues of Bunkyo Ward, Tokyo. Whichever the tenet, DST pieces in interactive workshops, the neighborhoods enjoy receiving them at community screening events, on local cable TV programs, and also as web content of their local institutions. DST pieces, such as ‘Digital Mingei’, activate neighborhood conversations. Through these conversations, people can become more aware of the DST stories, and stereotypical narratives from the mass and digital media. This process, as a result, develops abilities to critically receive and express opinions about images and stories of Bunkyo Ward.

Mediated communities and ‘social communities’ are closely related. The DST-mediated communities could thus be incubation sites for the development of new media literacy. Although they are small-sized as people’s geographic communities in the media-saturated society. Needless to say, the aforementioned suggestions apply both to Japan and in general. We can see the tenet of DST practices as a network of DST-mediated communities with a broad focus.

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5 More information see, Mizukoshi, S. (ed.) 2012. “Emerging ‘People’s Art’”, one of the CREST (Core Research for Evolutional Science and Technology) projects funded by Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST) during 2006-2012.
8 Ibid., note 5.
Hacking Hong Kong

The competition between Asian cities to become the leading global city in the region reshapes the urban fabric in Hong Kong too. Amidst the urban redevelopment and art market hype, artists and urbanites initiate varied forms of urban creativity for local needs. The new agencies and strategies of urban creativity have a growing ability to raise awareness of socio-political issues, although not always without conflict. Provoking contradictory views is, however, part of the strength of urban creativity to generate new subjectivities.

Minna Valjakka

IN OCTOBER 2007, the local think tank Bauhinia Foundation Research Centre proposed in its policy submission paper that Hong Kong should aim to become a ‘creative metropolis’ and sought “to establish creativity as a major force in transforming Hong Kong’s cultural and socio-economic landscape.” Urban spaces were suggested among the five areas that require substantial improvement and social investment.”2

As Marissa Yiu elucidates, the growing presence of financial prowess and creative industries has transformed the structure of the city and especially the waterfront of West Kowloon “by subverting the dominant hegemony and by contributing to the construction of new subjectivities”.3 “Artistic activism that questions the prevailing authorities by, for instance, reclaiming the streets, ever more prominent among urban creativity in Hong Kong, represents a combination of transcultural and local elements, and also clearly illuminates the agonistic notions.”4 RST2’s main dissatisfaction is the inability of people to pay attention to the details of their everyday surroundings, the current political system in Hong Kong and the growing use of public space for political advertising. The modified visual language of the banners questions both the right of the political parties to use the public space, and their aesthetics. At the same time the banners challenge the citizen’s (mis)understanding of and (dis)engagement with their own environment.

RST2 names New York based artist Brian Donnelly (a.k.a. KAWS, b. 1974), who successfully subverted billboards in the 1990s, as one of his predecessors. The interventions made by both RST2 and other Hong Kong citizens, however, resonate with more international and intricate forms of civil disobedience than mere North-American ‘advertising’. Targeting the political banners reminds us of Eco’s call for “semiological guerrilla warfare,” “an action to urge the audience to control the message and its multiple possibilities of interpretation.”5 Along with Eco’s ideas of a ‘cultural guerrilla’, the other highly influential predecessor among (especially street) artists and activist is the ‘Situationist International’ (SI) and their adaptation of ‘detournement of preexisting aesthetic elements;’ as “the integration of present or past artistic production into a superior construction of a milieu.”6 Hijacking and modifying elements is one of the ‘anti-spectacular tactics’ developed by the SI and it deconstructs “the spectacle’s already estranged images in order to bring about unexpected re-appearances. It does this by damaging and polluting given spectacles so as to trigger or re-mediate a different social imaginary based on non-alienated relationships.”7 Situations and delagraffis as one form of ultra-détournement: a constructive strategy contesting the hegemony of public space from below and providing immediate social criticism.8

Especially in the US, ‘detournement motivated resistance to and subversion of the interrelated hegemony of media, politics and consumer culture—usually known as ‘cultural jamming’, a concept first introduced by the experimental music band, Negativland, in 1984.”9 Similar practices were, nonetheless, already being employed by various international activist and artist groups, for example: Spaygunvillis [fan guerrilla], Privo and Billboard Utilising Graffitists Against Unhealthy Promotions (BUBU UP).10 Originally, the tactics and intentions of the various groups across the borders represented quite a versatile oeuvre, composition, returned the banners, and waited to see if anyone would notice the modifications. The banners were left unnoticed for a month, leading RST2 to conclude that “Hongkongers are completely ignorant to what happens around them, and therefore I continued to paint them.” At first, RST2 chose banners from the parties he politically disagreed with, but gradually he started to target the banners of the better known figures to gain more public attention. For instance, in April 2011 when Hongkongers called in support of Chinese contemporary artist Ai Weiwei, RST2 repainted the banner of Paul Tse Wai-chun, “Superman of Law,” who was indifferent to Ai’s detention (fig. 1). RST2 spray painted a cartoon like speech balloon below the legislator’s face on the banner, which made it appear as if he was asking, “Where is Ai Weiwei?,” a popular question at the time. This modified banner, which hung on the busy Sai Yeung Choi street in Mongkok, caught the local media’s eye too.

In March 2013, RST2 re-used a set of three banners of the Democratic Party and the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong. This set illuminates RST2’s stylistic shift to cover up the surface with visibly eye-catching elements rich with visual and linguistic puns. Employing visuals from the video game and animated movie Angry Birds, and the Cantonese homophone for the game’s name, the poignant message depicts the politicians as ‘shithheads’, the pigs targeted by the ‘angry birds’ (fig. 2). In RST2’s view, which usually relies on multi-levelled local references, Angry Birds represents a combination of transcultural and local elements, and also clearly illuminates the agonistic notions. RST2’s three main dissatisfaction is the inability of people to pay attention to the details of their everyday surroundings, the current political system in Hong Kong and the growing use of public space for political advertising. The modified visual language of the banners questions both the right of the political parties to use the public space, and their aesthetics. At the same time the banners challenge the citizen’s (mis)understanding of and (dis)engagement with their own environment.

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including countering political ideologies and institutional positions through inventive hoaxes. Although culture jamming is not necessarily only against capitalism, as the AlterNet magazine (founded in 1989) gained international popularity, Adbusters is not necessarily only against capitalism, after the mid-eighteenth-century Romanticism, and persists today extends from early Christian asceticism, is sifted through a digital clock counting down towards 1 July 2047. In an interview, Sampson Wong clarified that the adapted artwork referred to another Wong Kar-wai film, 2004: (2004), which is filled with metaphoric use of the number, but also represents the last year of the ‘one country, two systems’ policy. Significantly though, ‘the clock’ on the ICC display repeatedly counted down the same minute, showing the same series of numbers every evening, never getting nearer its final time. In fact, its stationary condition questioned the work’s main message. On the Add Oil team’s website, however, the time was ticking away towards 1 July 2047. The meaning of the work was not only ‘hijacked’, but also ‘hacked’ by the virtual add-on installation.

Unsurprisingly, the recontextualization of the work and its subsequent early elimination from the exhibition on 23 May 2016 launched intense public discussion on censorship, artists’ rights and responsibilities, and the future of art in the city. Statements and clarifications were made by the partakers and opinions supporting both sides were strongly voiced. While some hailed the artists’ witiness, the majority of the art community seemed to see the event as sheer line and had used the exhibition for self-promotional purposes. And the fact that the artists had accepted the fee from the curator complicated the matter further as it turned the work into a commissioned one. Importantly though, Sampson Wong insisted that the content of the work had not been altered after submission at the end of April, and that the curator and organizers knew beforehand the meaning of the work.

Art and curator Oscar Ho spelled out the major concern of how artistic rights are more than about individual interventions. The moral responsibility to and respect for other stakeholders, such as curators and participating artists, are essential cornerstones of artistic professionalism. Even though subverting the original meaning was not illegal, it shattered the wholeness of the exhibition and was considered inattentive to other participants. The unprofessional behavior, rather than the content of the work, was the primary reason for the curator, Caroline Ha Thuc, to withdraw the work. For her it was not an act of censorship, but a professional sanction. Analyzed from the broader perspective of the art community, the re-framing of the work as activism with political implications also put the shared artistic freedom at risk, as Ho maintains: ‘If an isolated case causes a termination of the sponsorship, the right to talk, and not talk, about politics.’ Ho’s statement was unfortunately somewhat prescient, as the Open Sky Project was indeed consequently cancelled later that year.

The right to hack the city?

While Ho’s opinion might seem more supportive of the institutional stance than an act of rebellion, Wu also echoes Harvey’s understanding of Lefebvre’s often reiterated ‘right to the city,’ with an emphasis on the collective aspects of the possibility for social change. It is a “right to change ourselves by changing the city” and therefore, “a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization.” Even in instances of civil disobedience, Harvey’s defense of collective actions to reshape the city is inevitably valid. Long-term social change requires participation and group power. But what he seems to ignore is the possible need of individual agency for an agonistic approach, as the initiative not only raises awareness but builds engagement with(in) the community. An individual like RST2, working anonymously and alone, or the short-lived ‘digital hijacking’ by the Add Oil team, will unlikely bring about long-term social change, but they will most likely have an impact on public discussion and on agency active in the urban public space – especially because they launch conflicting opinions, which can provoke people to adopt a critical attitude and engage in political discussions.

Hacking the city through urban creativity can vary from beautification to destruction, and from involvement in urban planning and community. New strategies and interventions are more successful in their engagement with communities, while others may have unexpected and unwanted consequences. What they usually have in common, is the ability to employ urban public spaces as discursive planes for provoking new perceptions. The importance of artistic and creative rights, possibly including ‘hacking’, cannot be excluded from the discussions of the future cities and their well-being. How these rights are defined and what forms they are allowed to take requires further research with new theoretical and methodological approaches.

The complexities and interrelations of urban creativity in today’s Hong Kong cannot be fully grasped if reduced to mere reflections of adhocracy or cultural jamming with their Western connotations. Downtown provides more possible visions for analyzing the varied forms of urban creativity, especially as a form of hacktivist participatory art, which, but has its limits: despite the resourceful owe of the Situationists, the main theoretical framing emphasizes the targeting of spectacle, caused by neo-liberal capitalism. Similarly, at first glance, many interventions might seem to fulfill Mouffo’s emphasis on struggle against neo-liberal hegemony, but as elucidated by both RST2 and the Add Oil team, the great potential of a spectrum, communal, societal, political and aesthetic, is far beyond the myopic focus on anti-capitalism despite the dominant corporal power in and privatization of urban public space. In the case of both RST2 and the Add Oil team, the primary concern is the future of Hong Kong and its current geopolitical position.

References

6. All comments by RST2, graffiti artist, come from interviews with the author, 1 August 2016.
10. Ibid., pp.77-78.
12. I wish to thank researcher and artist, Dr Javier Abarca, for insights on creative resistance.
15. Original statement provoked by the artists. Sampson Wong, video call interview with the author, 1 August 2016.
16. Statement and a short video available online: http://tinyurl.com/hk/countdown/
17. Sampson Wong, video call interview with the author, 1 August 2016.
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The IBP 2017 Dissertation Awards: a progress report

Alex McKay

SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 1998 when the first International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) was held in Leiden (the Netherlands), ICAS has become the largest gathering of its kind in the world. Since then over 1500 scholars have attended ICAS conferences held mostly at universities in more than 20 countries had been accepted for the IBP Dissertation Awards (a handful were rejected for various reasons). Of these, there are 59 countries represented and 119 countries to date. All of whose authors were awarded doctoral degrees between June 2014 and June 2016 (with a certain latitude to allow for the processing involved). The Dissertation Judging Committee, overseen by ICAS Secretary Dr Paul van der Velde and myself, are currently compiling a ‘long list’ of 10 dissertations in each category.

The winners will be announced at ICAS 10 in Chiang Mai.

In addition to the main Awards, the judges will also grant Acclades in both disciplines for (1) Most Accessible and Captivating Work for the Non-specialist Reader; (2) Specialist Dissertation; and (3) Ground-breaking/Innovative Subject Matter. However, close attention and detailed writings that, while not judged the overall best in their discipline, are non-the-less of considerable quality in important areas. Winners of these Acclades will also be announced in Chiang Mai.

The making of a winner

The process of an award-winning dissertation is of course a matter of interpretation by the judges. But clearly the best dissertations will have the primary merit of originality, along with scholastic qualities such as depth (and breadth) of research, evidence of intellectual quality, clear and sophisticated arguments, good organisation and presentation of evidence leading to significant conclusions likely to be of interest to the wider field, a consistent and properly considered theoretical and/or methodological framework, and of course it must include due acknowledgement of sources and proper presentation of bibliography, notes and associated scholastic apparatus. They will also have the minimum of typographical errors and the standard of writing and use of English, language will be of a good standard. (Here we should note that just as the IBP Book Awards have been expanded to include languages beyond English, consideration is now being given to similar future expansion of the IBP Dissertation Awards.)

Receiving a Dissertation Award or Accolade, and even to be included on the long and particularly the short lists, is an important career milestone for any young scholar. It gives a significant boost to their resume and perhaps most importantly, alerts academic publishers to the quality of their work. Many major academic publishers will be represented in Chiang Mai, and can be expected to give serious consideration to any publication proposal for which the submitter has received an IBP award/Accolade.

The PhD pitch

ICAS 10 will also offer another opportunity for recent PhDs to promote their work. A ‘PhD pitch’ has been introduced at which they will have the chance to give a brief outline of the work to an audience of interested scholars, publishers and even potential employers - who may question the candidates on the findings. This is intended to be a real practical chance for presenters to meet other interested in their field of enquiry.

Thematic trends

An interesting aspect of the submissions for the IBP Dissertation Awards are the insights they provide into wider trends in Asian studies, in particular the direction in which the field is heading. Of course the sample is comparatively small and there is no doubt that certain fields must be under-represented. There is, for example, only one submission in the field of language studies and very little in the environmental field. But what of the virtual absence of both grand narratives and grand theories? Does this imply a mistrust of such constructions or suggest ignoring specialisation? Certainly it does not imply a lack of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense. It is noteworthy, an implicit of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense. It is noteworthy, an implicit of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense. It is noteworthy, an implicit of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense. It is noteworthy, an implicit of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense. It is noteworthy, an implicit of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense. It is noteworthy, an implicit of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense. It is noteworthy, an implicit of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense. It is noteworthy, an implicit of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense. It is noteworthy, an implicit of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense. It is noteworthy, an implicit of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense. It is noteworthy, an implicit of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense. It is noteworthy, an implicit of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense. It is noteworthy, an implicit of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense. It is noteworthy, an implicit of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense. It is noteworthy, an implicit of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense.

Alex McKay, Chair of the Dissertation Reading Committee, IBP 2017, ICAS (dmungo@hotmail.com)
ICAS Book Prize 2017 Colleagues’ Choice Award
Cast your vote at www.icas.asia
Ocean of Law II: Islamic Legal Crossings in the Indian Ocean World

Leiden University, 12-14 December 2016

THE SPREAD AND GROWTH OF ISLAMIC LAW across the Indian Ocean world have been largely neglected by scholars of Islamic law, Middle East specialists, and scholars of the Indian Ocean, despite South and Southeast Asia together being home to the largest Muslim population in the world. The international conference ‘Ocean of Law II: Islamic Legal Crossings in the Indian Ocean World’ held at Leiden University between 12 and 14 December 2016 explored this understudied area, particularly the ways in which the commercial and cultural ‘peripheries’ of the Islamic world shaped their lives and thoughts within and beyond the jurisdictional frameworks of Islam.

The conference was held in continuation to the conference ‘Ocean of Law: Intermediary Legal Systems across the Indian Ocean World’ organised in December 2015. It was made possible in part by a major grant from the Leiden University Centre for the Study of Islam and Society (LUCIS) and the Institute for History. Scholars from various countries, disciplines and expertise came together and presented their research on histories of Islamic law in different regions of the Indian Ocean littoral. They explored how and why Islamic legal ideas and texts travelled across borders, how ideas and texts shaped legal practices they encountered during their journey; how and why legal cultures negotiated, influenced and contested each other at the moment of sites of their interactions and the unique pre-existence of Shi‘ī school of Islamic law in this Indian Ocean rim has been a vital phenomenon in shaping many social, cultural, religious and political perspectives of its Muslim communities across centuries. The conference unravelled such nuances in a long-term historical perspective and with multi-cited ethnographic approaches.

In the first panel, Elizabeth Hooton (University of Chicago) discussed the mobility of two formulations of Islamic law in the nineteenth century: Islam as the religion of the state, and Islam as providing the content of state legislation and policy. Taking the journeys and emigrations of Sulayman b. Ahmad al-Mandary across legal realms from Java to Bali to Jakarta to Istanbul and England, she drew attention to the processes of translation, comparison and repetition as useful tools for studying the mobility of law in the Indian Ocean world.

On the second day, Ronit Ricci (Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Australia National University) and Leon Buusken (Leiden University and NIMAR) delivered keynote speeches on the circulation of Islam, its law, texts and/or people. In her speech, Ricci explored nuances of Islamization, vernacular writing, and the legal traditions of Sulayman al-Mandary, the Gayonese legal code called 45 Fatāwā al-'ālamkīrīyyah compiled during the twelfth century CE. He explained how this code revealed the Mughal attempt to assert its legitimacy through this codification and the structural transformations in its imperial domination. Following him, Arfanayah (Leiden University) also underscored another imperial codification from a different place and time: from Gaya in the Arab Province of Indonesia. The Gayonese legal code called 45 Articles of Linge Lord was assumed codified by the Linge Kingdom in the twelfth century CE. He explained how this code has been used by the contemporary local government to police public morality, in spite of questions on the authenticity and legitimacy of the code.

On the last day, Philipp Bruckmayr (University of Vienna) presented a series of case studies that enabled legal circulations, and constant dialogues within the Indian Ocean world. He analysed a sixteen-century legal text, Fatt al-Mārīj of Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn Mahdī, to illustrate how its author took a moderate stance in his legal formulations to fit the particular contexts of his audience. He concluded with the help of the British legal identities granted to many local inhabitants, the ECJ courts often used law to define the local kings as unlawful and to bring them under the imperial sovereignty. Rashid Choudhury (Harvard University) spoke about the journeys of South Asian ulama to the Hijaz and their ramifications on local webs of knowledge in late Mughal India. Concentrating on a Sunni revisualist Muhammad Hādhīm (d. 1791) and his Indo-Persian Hāji manual titled Niyāt al-Qulūb fī Ziyārat al-Maḥbūb, Choudhury argued that the South Asian ulama’s participation in the contemporary intellectual and pilgrim networks reflected the rapid transitions in political and ideological realms of the subcontinent and the Hijaz.

R. Michael Feeney (Oxford University) moderated the roundtable at the end of the conference. He emphasised the broad themes that had come up in the presentations, particularly with regard to the very form and structure of law as understood varyingly from the early Islamic heartlands to the late Indian Ocean littoral. He motivated the participants to think about the potential terminologies and conceptions for comparative and connected analyses of Islamic legal circulations across the Indian Ocean world that would help future researches. In the following discussion, several participants highlighted a few recurrent themes such as the cultures of Muslim encounters, the infrastructure of the Indian Ocean that enabled legal circulations, and constant dialogues within and without the maritime communities. The conference proceedings will be published as a peer-reviewed edited volume in the Leiden Studies in Islam and Society series of LUCIS.

Mahnood Koorka, postdoctoral fellow at the School of Middle Eastern Studies, Leiden University Institute for Area Studies; formerly, joint research fellow at the International Institute for Asian Studies (RAS) and African Studies Centre (ASC), Leiden (m.kooriadathodi@hum.leidenuniv.nl).

In the following panel, Tom Hoogervorst (KITLV Leiden) took an lexical approach to demonstrate various levels and layers of influence on the Southeast Asian’s legal terminologies and related practices. With several examples of phrases and words in local, Indic and Arabic languages used in the archipelago, he illustrated historically-linguistically that the Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic legal practices and texts were localized in premodern Southeast Asia rather than that the Island was assimilated to external influences. Mahmoud Kooria (ASC, Leiden) discussed cases of several African jurists who worked in South and Southeast Asia before 1950. He drew attention to seeing the history of Islamic law as a product of an Afro-Asia-Arab triangle instead of limiting it to an Arab-export. See also this issue, pp. 8-9.

In the third panel, Sanne Ravennenga (Leiden University) articulated the functions of Jeanne Ponghui as advisors on Islamic law to the Dutch colonial pluralistic courts. She argued that several stereotypes attributed to them in the popular writings or earlier studies were only exaggerations, and often the pluralistic court maintained their position for the status quo, the recognition they had in the community and for the effectiveness of the courts. In a similar vein, Om Aloni (Tel-Aviv University) also presented a case from the Israeli Supreme Court that ruled in favor of bigamy in order to “restore the peace in the village.” His paper focused on the dilemma of bigamy and polygamy in early Israeli communities with regard to the existing practices among the Eastern Arab communities.

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On the second day, Naveen Kanal (University of California Los Angeles) talked about the discourses of legalism and sovereignty in the Mughal Empire with reference to the production of the Fatāwā al-Shāfi‘īyyah by compiled under the reign of Aurangzeb Alamgir’s reign (r. 1658–1707). He said that the Fatāwā reveals the Mughal attempt to assert its legitimacy through this codification and the structural transformations in its imperial domination. Following him, Arfanayah (Leiden University) also underscored another imperial codification from a different place and time: from Gaya in the Arab Province of Indonesia. The Gayonese legal code called 45 Articles of Linge Lord was assumed codified by the Linge Kingdom in the twelfth century CE. He explained how this code has been used by the contemporary local government to police public morality, in spite of questions on the authenticity and legitimacy of the code.

Hassan Khalilkhil (University of Haraf) presented in the next panel on how piracy was perceived in Islamic law over several generations. Quoting the foundational scriptures and early classical writers, he expounded various restrictive measures Islamic law took to curtail piracy with clear distinctions from maritime jihad. Nicholas W.S. Smith (Northwestern University) presented a concrete case from Somalia in the late nineteenth century with his emphasis on the political and diplomatic career of the self-proclaimed sultan, Uthman Ahmad Yusuf. However, Smith showed that Yusuf’s sovereign-state in north-eastern Somali coast did not follow any European, indigenous or Islamic legal practices, but rather it took highly malleable and heterogenous laws at its disposal.

On the last day, Philipp Bruckmayr (University of Vienna) opened the penultimate panel by focusing on major Islamic legal debates in Cambodia in the early twentieth century. On the basis of Fatwas of Malay muftis in Mecca and Kelantan and the French colonial documents from the Cambodian National Archives, he highlighted the active engagement of the Cambodian Muslims in the Islamic legal crossings across the Gulf of Siam and the Indian Ocean at large. Similarly, Abbas Panakkal (Griffith University) emphasised the juridical contributions of Malabar to the broader Shi‘ī legal discussions in its maritime context. He analysed a sixteenth-century legal text, Fatt al-Mārīj of Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn Mahdī, to illustrate how its author took a moderate stance in his legal formulations to fit the particular contexts of his audience. Nurfaridah Yahaya (National University of Singapore) elucidated how East India Company (EIC) courts in the Straits of Malacca asserted authority at the expense of Malay sovereignty from the late eighteenth till the mid-nineteenth century.

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NOW IN ITS FIFTH YEAR, the Asian Borderlands Research Network (ABRN) Conference was jointly organised by the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) and local host Social Science Baha, Kathmandu, from 12-14 December 2016. IIAS, since its inception in 1993, has been promoting global knowledge exchange and collaboration in the studies of Asia and intra-Asian links. Social Science Baha, a non-profit organization based in Nepal, has been engaged in the production and dissemination of social science research since 2002. The Fifth ABRN Conference was a chock-full affair, occupying all four venues at the grand Hotel Annapurna, and seeing full attendance on the three conference days.

Conference themes and panels

This year, the central theme of the conference was ‘Dynamic Borderlands: Livelihoods, Communities and Flows’. Contrary to the general perception of borderlands as remote and static areas, the conference sought to highlight connections across borders that are sustained over time, and contingent processes, social and political, which lend a dynamic character to boundary situations, and seeing full attendance on the three conference days.

Conference themes and panels

Confidence in the organisation of the conference was crucial, and to this end, the conference aimed to create a space for dialogue and exchange, as well as to foster new partnerships and collaborations. The conference was divided into three main sections, each focusing on a different theme: Political and Social Change, Regional Integration and Development, and Culture and Identity.

The conference was attended by a diverse group of scholars from across Asia and beyond, representing a wide range of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, political science, and history. The programme included a mix of plenary sessions, panel discussions, and poster presentations, as well as a number of special events, such as a closing ceremony and a reception.

Additional events

The conference also hosted an evening of protest music with singer/songwriter Ronid (Akhu) Chingangbam from the militarized Indian state of Manipur. Two events organised exclusively for conference participants – a one-day hiking excursion to Nagarkot Changu and a two-day trip to the Janakpur border – were added attractions.

The Sixth ABRN Conference

The Sixth ABRN Conference to be held in 2018 has a number of potential hosts in Bangladesh, Malaysia and some other East Asian countries, though the final venue has yet to be decided. The call for papers will be announced in December 2017.

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Southeast Asia Neighborhoods Network (SEANNET)

The cities of this very diverse region have many different phases thanks to the difference in nation-state building processes and differing levels of economic and institutional development. Singapore, for instance, features a high degree of integration 'at the top' between state technocrats and their real estate and financial corporate counterparts. Such a structure, is rarely matched in other Southeast Asian countries, even in large metropolises like Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City or jakarta, whose growth is only partially determined by the state and its agents. Even in a highly centrally planned Vietnam, the influence of state actors in urban development pales in comparison with their Chinese counterparts. The structural autonomy of these cities makes it difficult for the state, its actors and its state-sanctioned expertise to control their evolution. Large-scale urban transformations are often shaped by the existence of a massive transnational corporate complex with the financial muscle and power to 'shape' these cities, often in collusion with local authorities. This phenomenon has increased considerably in the last twenty years or so. It has, in turn, led to the emergence of new forms of local responses which, in a number of cases, saw citizens' organizations take original modes of action, including in the form of grass-root movements. A number of Southeast Asian cities are experiencing cases of citizen-based resistance movements against mega urban projects, and with them, the beginning of the definition of alternative discourses on city-making processes. This trend is being encountered in the metropolitan areas of Manila, jakarta and Bangkok, as well as in a number of intermediary cities, especially in highly decentralized countries like Indonesia or the Philippines. These forms of local urban participation are themselves often connected to movements of renewal in the cities' provincial hinterlands. In a number of intermediate cities of Southeast Asia the link between rural hinterlands and city centres remains strong and therefore needs to be further explored.

The SEANNET program is not only seeks to document the struggle of neighborhood residents against large developmental interests by underscoring the creative forms of micro-level agency among neighborhood dwellers, it also sets out to frame them into alternative educational and transmittable knowledge. In that sense, the story of Southeast Asian neighborhoods will not only consider resistances and resilience of communities and their residents, but also how bottom-up innovations can impact upon, and effectively change policy strategies at the top.

Organization of the program

The SEANNET program is organized into four phases:
1. Methodological framing
2. Field research implementation
3. Interactions, discussions and analysis
4. Dissemination of research and deliberations' outcomes

The first, critical part of the program is aimed at a methodological framing and field research preparations. It will be officially completed with a day-long final workshop during ICAS 10, in Chang Mai (July 2017). The conclusion of the ICAS meeting will set in motion the second phase of the program, consisting of case-study research, carried out by local researchers and with a duration of approximately nine months each, in the following six historic neighborhoods: Wua Lai, Chang Mai (Thailand); Wat Kao Nang Leong, Bangkok, Thailand; Ward 13 and 14, Phi Nhu district, Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam); Escolta Santa Cruz district, Manila (Philippines); and Kampung Pencereh, Surabaya (Indonesia). The next phase of the program will be aimed at discussion and analysis through various activities, including for each case-study a localized, in situ, roundtable, followed by a workshop for the development of a policy action plan. During the fourth and final phase of the program, the results from the fieldwork and roundtable sessions will be further analyzed and transformed into academic research and pedagogical outputs.

Seeking to emphasize multi- and cross-disciplinary under-standings of 'the city', SEANNET explicitly engages local researchers in the process. The resulting pedagogy will likely be experiential, dialogical and ethicographic. These characteristics have been broadly identified through a body of knowledge produced by previous researches and activities carried out by IAS and its partners. In the process of the SEANNET program, they will be further refined through exchanges that specifically engage new partners out of the selected Southeast Asian case studies.

Network, coordination and management

Organized as a platform of individuals and institutions under the coordination of IAS and connected with the Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UKNA), SEANNET is meant to bring together and nurture a collection of early career scholars and urban practitioners, and their institutions, to shape a new community of like-minded city specialists who will share a common engagement linking scholarship and local practice. This network will be shaped by the involved local, regional and international researchers. Each case-study is conducted by local researchers under the direction of both a local and international principal investigator. The overall intellectual breadth and direction of the program is led by a Steering Committee consisting of scholars from the following partners: Chiang Mai University – Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSSD); Gadjah Mada University – Department of Architecture and Planning (DOAP); Harvard University – Asia Center; International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS); National University of Singapore – Asia Research Institute (ARI); Paris-Belleville National School of Architecture (ENSAPB-IPRL/US); UMR AIC/TS; Yale University – Council on Southeast Asian Studies; and The University of California, Irvine – Department of Anthropology. As overall program coordinator, IIAS is responsible for the inter-institutional, logistical and fiduciary management of the overall program.

Website: www.ukna.asia/seannet

Program Coordinator: Paul Rabé (IAS/UKNA Secretariat) Deputy Coordinator: Lin Xiaolan (IAS/UKNA Secretariat) Regional Facilitator: Ritu Padvani (IIAS Research Institute, National University of Singapore)

SEANNET is funded by the Henry Luce Foundation, New York. The contents of this article are the sole responsibility of IAS/UKNA and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the Henry Luce foundation.

References
1. IAS/UKNA and affiliations with institutions such as the University of Yangon; Chiang Mai University; Thammasat University; Vietnamese-German University; Universitas Airlangga; Surabaya; UMR AIC3; Harvard University; Yale University; Paris Diderot University; University of California; Irvine – Department of Anthropology. As overall program coordinator, IIAS is responsible for the inter-institutional, logistical and fiduciary management of the overall program.
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- Saskia Gieling, Senior Commissioning Editor Asian Studies
  - s.gieling@aup.nl

- Shannon Cunningham, Commissioning Editor Asian Studies
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Historical Photographs of China

The redesigned Historical Photographs of China web site (www.hpcbristol.net) was formally launched in January 2017, showcasing over 10,500 images, including 1,400 recently added images from nine new collections.

Robert Bickers and Jamie Carstairs

These include a large and diverse selection of photographs from Shanghai-based news photographer Malcolm Rosholt, the family photographs of Sikh life and work in Shanghai in the Ranjit Singh Sangha collection (see also p.22 of this issue), and some of Felice Beato’s photographs of the bloody 1860 North China Campaign. Joining the cast of personalities are Rabindranath Tagore, Mao Zedong, the Tenth Panchen Lama, Felix the Cat, General Sir Robert Napier, Father Jacquinot, and sometime North-China Daily News editor R.W. Little.

The new images range from 1860 (with some earlier ones on their way soon), to 1949 (with some later ones on their way in the not too distant future). Images can be downloaded and used under a Creative Commons licence.

On the relaunched HPC web site, we have tried to enhance discoverability and alleviate dependency on keyword/tag searching, by offering several ways to find images, such as a ‘Lucky Dip’ (a random sampling of images; www.hpcbristol.net/explore), via collection names, via names of photographers (www.hpcbristol.net/photographers) and via some themed collections (www.hpcbristol.net/featured-collections), as well as an advanced search facility. ‘Lucky Dip’, in which you find yourself with unexpected people in unexpected places, is proving to be an enlightening way to pass the time, procrastinating other work.

Another new feature is a ‘Related Photographs’ link to other photographs linked in some way to the one displayed. We cannot say that coverage through this is comprehensive, but we are linking photographs where we can (where, for example, they might be split across albums or collections).

Since 2006, the HPC project has located, digitised, archived, and disseminated online photographs from the substantial holdings of images of modern China held in private hands outside the country, as well as in public collections. These photographs are often of even greater historic interest than might ordinarily be the case, as the destruction of materials in China through war and revolution in the twentieth century, and especially during the 1966-69 Cultural Revolution, means that there is a relative dearth today of accessible photographic records in China itself.

We’d be very happy for any general feedback and especially notification of factual/name/location/date errors, typos, glaring omissions, etc. Also, we are always interested to hear how you use the site. Developing the new HPC platform has been supported by awards from the AHRC, British Academy, the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation, and Swire Trust, and with vital support from the University of Bristol’s IT Services.

More information

Picturing China: An AHRC 10th Anniversary film
The film highlights the rich variety of our photographs, and gives you a glimpse of how we work, and why we are doing this. Enjoy. www.ahrc.ac.uk/research/readwatchlisten/filmandpodcasts/picturingchina

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IIAS Research and Projects

IIAS research and other initiatives are carried out within a number of thematic clusters in phase with contemporary Asian currents – all built around the notion of social agency. The aim of this approach is to cultivate synergies and coherence between people and projects. IIAS also offers research for the open cluster, so as not to exclude potentially significant and interesting topics. Visit www.iias.nl for more information.

Global Asia

THE GLOBAL ASIA CLUSTER addresses contemporary issues related to trans-national interactions within the Asian region as well as Asia’s projection into the world. Through the movement of goods, people, ideas, knowledge, ideologies and so forth. Past and present trends are addressed. The cluster aims to explore the understanding of the processes of globalisation by considering the various ways Asian and other world regions are interconnected within a long-term historical framework. Acknowledging the central role of Asia as an agent of global transformations, it challenges western perspectives that underlie much of the current literature on the subject and explores new forms of non- hegemonic intellectual interactions in the form of ‘south-south-north’ and ‘east-west’ dialogue models. In principle, any research dealing with Asian global interactions is of interest.

Asian Borderlands

The Asian Borderlands Research Network focuses particularly on the border regions between South Asia, Central/East and Southeast Asia. The concerns of the ABRN are varied, ranging from migratory movements, transformations in cultural, linguistic and religious practices, to ethnicity mobilization and conflict, migration and environment concerns. The ABRN organizes a conference in one of these border regions every two years in cooperation with a local partner. See also page 45 of this issue.

Asian Cities

THE ASIAN CITIES CLUSTER is interested in the forces driving urbanization and urban development in different parts of the Asian region. It seeks to explore the origins of urbanism and urban culture in different parts of Asia and linking the various elements of city cultures and sociocultural development in (pre-modern and post-colonial) times. Through an international knowledge-network of experts, cities and research institutions it seeks to encourage social scientists and scholars in the humanities to interact with contemporary actors including artists, activists, planners and architects, engineers, and policy makers. By bringing together science and practice, IIAS aims to create a platform for scholars and urban practitioners focusing on Asian cities ’identity’ and beyond traditional western norms of knowledge.

IIAS Centre for Regulation and Governance

IIAS Centre for Regulation and Governance in Asia is engaged in innovative and comparative research on theories and practices – focusing on emerging markets of Asia. The multi-disciplinary research undertakings combine approaches from political economy, law, public administration, criminology, and sociology in the comparative analysis of regulatory issues in Asia and in developing theories of governance pertinent to Asian realities.

IIAS Research and Projects

Humanities across Borders: Asia and Africa in the World

A four-year programme supported by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) at Leiden University has been awarded a four-year grant by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, New York, to facilitate a collaborative platform of more than 20 Asian, African, European and North American universities and their local social and cultural partners, for the co-creation of a new humanities pedagogical model. This follows the successful completion in 2016 of a three-year project (Rethinking Asian Studies in a Global Context), supported by the same foundation, to develop the scholarly practice of area (Asia) studies in today’s global postcolonial context. IIAS is grateful to the Mellon Foundation and Leiden University for their continuing support.

The new programme titled ‘Humanities across Borders: Asia and Africa in the World’ calls for expanding the scope of the humanities by mobilizing knowledge-practices that have largely remained unrepresented in contemporary academia. It will connect a global network of individuals and institutions capable of generating and garnering new knowledge-networks of experts, cities and research institutions. It aims to develop alternative pedagogies for teaching, research, and dissemination across disciplinary, national, and institutional borders. The aim is to contribute to the realignment of the social role and mission of institutions of higher learning with regard to the humanistic identity, by exploring the origins of the ‘Asian Cities’ cluster aims to explore the longstanding Asian heritage and their implications for social agency. Doing so, it explores the notion of heritage as it evolved from an originally European concept of an institution with architecture and monumental archaeology to incorporate a broader diversity of cultural forms and values. This includes the contestations of ‘tangible’ and ‘intangible’ heritage, and the importance of cultural heritage in defining one’s own identity or identities vis-à-vis those of others. The wide variety of activities carried out in this context, among others, aim to engage with the such concepts of ‘authenticity’, ‘national heritage’ and ‘shared heritage’ and, in general, issues pertaining to the political economy of heritage.

Asian Heritage

THE ASIAN HERITAGES CLUSTER focuses on the uses of culture and cultural heritage practices in Asia. In particular, it addresses the variety of definitions associated with heritage and their implications for social agency. Doing so, it explores the notion of heritage as it evolved from an originally European concept of an institution with architecture and monumental archaeology to incorporate a broader diversity of cultural forms and values. This includes the contestations of ‘tangible’ and ‘intangible’ heritage, and the importance of cultural heritage in defining one’s own identity or identities vis-à-vis those of others. The wide variety of activities carried out in this context, among others, aim to engage with the such concepts of ‘authenticity’, ‘national heritage’ and ‘shared heritage’ and, in general, issues pertaining to the political economy of heritage.

Al Shati refugee camp in Gaza. A typology of digital platforms and spaces for cultural and social engagement in the Middle East and North Africa.

Indian Medical Heritage Research Network

The Indian Medical Heritage Research Network wants to stimulate social-cultural and social-historical research on Indian medical traditions such as Ayurveda, Unani Tibb, Siddha, Yoga and Sowa, East Asia, and Africa. A special interest is the integration of Indian medicine in Indian public health and its role as second resort for middle class Indians and Europeans. The network offers a virtual space (https://www.indianmedicalheritage.org) for collating research findings and other information about India’s medical heritage covering diverse perspectives, interests and backgrounds.

Contact: Elena Paskaleva (e.g.paskaleva@hum.leidenuniv.nl) or William Vogelsang (w.e.vogelsang@iias.nl)

Website: www.iias.nl/critical-heritage-studies

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Along with the research fellows who are attached to one of the IIAS research programmes, the Institute yearly hosts a large number of visiting researchers (affiliated fellows) who come to Leiden to work on their own individual research project. In addition, IIAS also facilitates the teaching and research by various professorial fellows as part of agreements with Dutch universities, foreign ministries and funding organisations.

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FOR PROMISING YOUNG INDOLOGISTS at the post-doctorate level, it is possible to apply for funding with the J. Gonda Foundation, to spend three to six months doing research at IIAS. Please send your application to the J. Gonda Foundation by the appropriate deadline below. The J. Gonda Foundation of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) supports the scholarly study of Sanskrit, other Indian languages and literature, and Indian cultural history. In addition to enabling Indologists to spend time at IIAS, the foundation offers funding for projects or publications in Indology of both researchers and scientific publishers, as well as PhD grants.

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Application deadline: 1 April and 1 October every year

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IIAS Fellowship Programme

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Debjani Bhattacharyya
Drexel University, USA

Hydrologics: Property, law and the urban environment in the Bengal Delta

It is hard to believe that in a few weeks I will bid goodbye to all the friendships I forged in my short time in Leiden. I arrived in October 2016 hoping to finish my book manuscript Hydrologics: Property and Law in the Manufacturing of Calcutta. I was critical for us to appreciate the place of water and, with the encouragement, support and input from everyone here, I hope, in the coming months, I managed to finish the manuscript and was able to delve into a second project. Both my book manuscript and my current project seek to connect multiple historiographies – legal, urban, economic with the environment. IIAS, with its robust focus on oceanic histories, legal and urban histories was a perfect place to deepen and develop the questions I have been engaged with in my book.

My book argues that the materiality of colonial landscapes and their ecologies played a decisive role in the making of property laws and shaping the urban land market. The book proceeds by elaborating how – in the indeterminate and shifting landscape of deltaic Bengal – the concept of ‘property-thinking’ became critical in dividing land and water into discrete legal elements, with each being governed by separate arenas: riparian and land laws. At the same time, this delta space then became home to many urban infrastructural and legal experiments from the late eighteenth century that were transferred and transplanted to various parts of the world. Hydrologics concluded by illuminating how property-thinking, the revenue-economy and extractive principles have shaped and continue to shape patterns of urbanization in the region and the legal frameworks surrounding the property market. These developments have had devastating consequences, as evidenced in the recording coastline in the Bengal Delta and elsewhere across the world. My second project links the financial receding coastline in the Bengal Delta and elsewhere with the environment. IIAS, with its robust focus on multiple historiographies – legal, urban, economic and beyond traditional western norms and beyond traditional western norms.

Formal conversation with fellows, staff members and faculty at IIAS and Leiden University, as well as informal conversations at various bars (but mainly at De Bonte Koe) and over the Friday film screenings at the Institute have expanded my understandings around questions of political economy, law and history-writing. At IIAS I was also very fortunate to participate in the Urban Knowledge Network Asia (UNKA), whose coordinator Paul Rabé opened up a new world of intellectual engagement by introducing me to the work of the Dutch urban planners and their engagements with canals. IIAS is a place where nebulous ideas take a concrete form and, with the encouragement, support and input received from everyone here, I hope, in the coming years, to help IIAS organise a Summer School (see p.12 of this issue) on the theme of soaking ecologies as a new form of urbanism.

No reflection on my time here would be complete without a mention of the excursions organized by IIAS. Given my keen interest in the relation between land and water, Sandra Dehue kindly drove us to the ‘Neeltje Jans’, the impressive delta water works in Zeeland (province), which was critical for us to appreciate the place of water in Dutch history beyond the quaint canals. By the time this piece goes into print production, I will be busy packing my bags to head back to Drexel University to resume teaching, and wondering when I will again wake up to the cries of seagulls.

The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden, the Netherlands, invites outstanding researchers to apply for a fellowship to work on a relevant piece of research in the social sciences and humanities.

We are particularly interested in researchers focusing on one of the Institute’s three thematic clusters. However, some positions will be reserved for outstanding projects in any area outside of those listed.

Asian Cities

The Asian Cities cluster explores modes of urban development, and deals with cities and urban cultures with related issues of flows and fluxes, ideas and goods, cosmopolitanism and connectivity at their core, framing the existence of vibrant ‘civil societies’ and political micro-cultures. Through an international knowledge network, IIAS aims to create a platform for scholars and urban practitioners focusing on Asian cities ‘in context’ and beyond traditional western norms of knowledge.

Global Asia

The Global Asia cluster examines examples of and issues related to multiple, transnational intra-Asian interactions as well as Asia’s projection in the world. Historical experiences as well as more contemporary trends are addressed.

Research projects that can contribute to new, historically contextualised, multidisciplinary knowledge, with the capacity of translating this into social and policy relevant initiatives, will be privileged.

For information on the research clusters and application form visit our website:

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Artmandu. The city as a catalyst

Kathmandu Triennale is Nepal’s premier platform for global contemporary arts. It is the latest iteration of the pioneering Kathmandu International Art Festival. Like the precursory Festivals, whose 2009 and 2012 editions centered on the themes ‘Status of Women’ and ‘Earth|Body|Mind’, the Triennale thematically engages particular social issues while advancing a nuanced approach to promote the pedagogical potential of the arts. Through the Triennale, organizer Siddharta Arts Foundation (SAF) presents multiple perspectives on edition themes, to educate audiences and engage society in critical dialogue. Kathmandu Triennale’s inaugural edition (KT 2017) will be dedicated to the theme of ‘The City’.

KT 2017 will be sponsoring 12 art reporters from around the world who will gain VIP access during the Triennale. Anyone wishing to apply should get in touch visit their Indiegogo campaign page for more information: https://tinyurl.com/kt2017campaign.

EXHIBITIONS will be held between 24 March and 9 April 2017, at multiple venues across the Kathmandu Valley. The central exhibition, ‘The City: My Studio/The City: My Life’ will be directed by curator Philippe Van Cauteren. Additional curated showcases will be held alongside the central exhibition to present multiple world- perspectives on the central theme. These showcases are being organized by institutional partners and curators independently with support from KT 2017 as a local partner.

Central exhibition

Philippe Van Cauteren is the Artistic Director of the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.) in Ghent, Belgium, a contemporary art museum primarily focused on artists and their practice. It functions as an art laboratory, a place for experimentation, research and innovation. The museum poses questions, stimulates reflection and celebrates doubt. In the words of Van Cauteren, ‘The title of the exhibition ‘The City: My Studio’/The City: My Life’ clearly articulates the two functions that the city can have for an artist. Kathmandu (or any other city) as a working place, as the mold for artistic thinking and process. The city is also an arena where daily life is ‘performed’ in its richness and complexity. Invited artists are not to illustrate this definition of the city or urban life, but instead to take the city as a catalyst – as a laboratory to generate artistic forms, gestures, acts, ideas, art works. The city is much like a container in which, through random ways, direct and indirect, history, habits and traditions are preserved. The socio-cultural texture of the place; colors and odors; the past, the present and the future; stories’ facts and fiction – all of it activated in the same. The artist thus will aim to be an urban archaeologist who digs from the city these elements. In this exhibition Kathmandu serves as a unique and marvellous hub where encounters are generated between artists from Nepal and around the world.”

Contributing artists

There are two main components of KT 2017: Exhibitions and Encounters. Exhibitions include all visual content and Encounters encapsulate the educational outreach built on the production and presentation of exhibits. It will also host outreach events in public spaces and incorporate collateral events created by partners in its overall program. KT 2017 Exhibitions will see the participation of over 50 artists from more than 25 countries, with a considerable percentage representing Nepal. The roster has been selected by curator Philippe Van Cauteren to represent an inclusive list of established and younger artists covering different media actively used by artists today. International selections have been made on artists’ capacity to develop their work in Kathmandu within a limited timeframe prior to the exhibition, and also on their commitment to engage in capacity building for Nepal’s art scene. Although not decisive, these two elements – through the dialogue and exchange between the Nepal art community and visiting artists – will contribute to the dynamism of the exhibition.

Support and sponsorship

For those who would like to support the KT 2017 ‘Youth, Community and Children Engagement’ program, please visit their Indiegogo campaign page for more information: https://tinyurl.com/kt2017campaign.

KT 2017 is a Kathmandu-based visual art biennial that explores the contradictory–parallel existence of traditional beliefs, historic ideas and contemporary events. Sheelasha Rajbhandari is a Kathmandu-based visual artist whose works have been shown in major museums and biennales. Trained in traditional Tibetan thangka painting and training from Tibetan Buddhist nuns in traditional religious iconography she investigates the overlap between Buddhist and secular culture. Her body of work is a confluence of the culture’s ubiquitous themes, which are explored into a heightened multi-layered social, political, and global affairs contexts. Her artworks are aligned with her concept. She likes to compare and contrast her personal historic ideas and contemporary events. By employing mass transmutation, she is deeply concerned with how Nepali social fabric and individual lifestyle have been affected by the ten year Maoist and war mass migration, unofficial urban development and the unstable political situation of Nepal. International migration has increased exponentially since the civil war, leaving a generation and a community who are affected by the sense of community, the passing on of emotions/opinions with emotions and economic wellbeing. The series of work highlights both the emotional impact and the dramatic socio-economic changes that such a mass migration has ensued in the country.